SAI BABA
THE MASTER

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Sai Baba The Master
By Pujya Acharya Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja

Introduction

I

Man, in the first flush of scientific advancement, has considered religion to be a relic of superstition of primitive humanity. Today, the very advance of science has brought back the sense of awe and wonder at the immensity of the cosmos. Every step forward in science has made us aware how imperfect and tentative our knowledge has been, and is bound to be. The universe, with its mind-shattering dimensions, distances and speeds, down to the sub-atomic particles is basically a mystery.

That our knowledge should be incomplete can be easily understood: If the entire history of life on earth be equated to a hundred years, man's history occupies about a hundred minutes and that of modern science, a mere two seconds. That our knowledge is bound to be imperfect and incomplete can also be understood: "We know nothing of the universe beyond the effects that its happening produce on our senses, either directly or through the intervention of instruments," says Sir James Jeans. The sense organs register the various stimuli as vibrations and convey them to the brain. Our mind assembles its image of the external universe from them. The range of perception of our sense is very limited and there are bound to be vibrations which they cannot capture. Thus our experience of the universe is only a fraction of what it is; that too, a subjective projection of it. For we never can experience the source of even the vibrations that our senses gather.

This brings us to our knowledge of ourselves. Psychologists tell us that we are aware of only a minute fraction of our psyche, our being, i.e., of our potential for knowledge. Ancient spiritual philosophy which underlies religions and is confirmed by all great saints has a lot to offer us in this realm. It tells us that while our common means of knowledge is the mind functioning outwards through the senses, perceiving the discreteness of things in nature, the introverted mind of the saint goes deep down to the spiritual core of our being and experiences the spiritual unity of all that is. The latter thus realizes that Reality is normally veiled by the very make and functioning of our senses and by our normal awareness which is conditioned by them. In the mystic experience, on the other hand, man recognizes his identity with the Reality of all existence. The common form of knowledge is knowledge of particular things and does not affect our being, while mystical experience is knowledge of the unity of all existence which alchemizes our being. It transcends the limitations of individuality and leads to profound bliss and 'peace which passeth understanding'. The genuine spiritual experience of great mystics and even of some common individuals should enable us not to confuse their knowledge with the subjective delusions of deranged minds. The perfect blossoming of spiritual values in a genuine mystic, the peace and bliss he experiences and emanates are the promises which spiritual life holds out to humanity.

II

The significances of an accomplished mystic to religion is inestimable. All major religions sprang from the mystic experience of such - the Rishis of the Vedas and Upanishads; the Masters of Taoism, the Buddha, the Christ and prophet Mohammad. All religions are sustained too, from time to time, by the saints who demonstrate in their lives, the truth of the promise of religious life, that any mortal can realize the Spirit through genuine effort. The individual seekers too derive the true interpretation of the scriptures from the lives and teachings of such. *Upanishads* say that a disciplined seeker has to seek the guidance of a realized sage and Sri Krishna says the same in *The Bhagavadgita* (ch. iv : 34). The third of the three vows of Budhism, "*Sangham Sharanam Gacchami*", affirms the need to seek the association of the wise. The Chirst says, "No one can come to the Father save through me". He finds it so essential to spiritual life that he chooses to seek baptism from John the Baptist "for righteousness' sake". The esoteric school of Islam, *Sufism*, enjoins a seeker to resort to the *Pir-O-Murshad*. Even modern saints like Guru Nanak and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa were divinely directed to Masters even at an advanced stage of sadhana.

The point is driven home even more powerfully in world's mythologies. In Hinduism, Lord Dattatreya is the *Avatar* that manifests Himself to awaken and lead mankind to the verities of spiritual life. It is he that reveals himself in all the world's perfect masters of wisdom. The Budha and the *Bodhisattvas* are said to reincarnate for the same end. Every Christian saint had declared at the moment of realization that Christ lives in him and not he. Sai Baba of Shirdi has demonstrated that the One spirit of wisdom of all saints is He.

Further, all the world's mystical works say that association with a Master is of greater value than the study of scriptures. For the Master interprets the scriptures in a manner which is appropriate to his times and to the individual seekers and thus enables them to live up to the spirit (rather than the letter) of religion.

III

Yet it is hard to recognize genuine spiritual masters among the teeming half-baked ones with false claims. It is the latter class that make organized religion an odious mess that repels the cultured today. To help the common seekers to find genuine Masters, all religions have adopted some common means. Firstly, the lives and teachings of great masters bring into relief the hall marks of such a one. Some scriptures even clearly spell them as The *Bhagavadgita* does the qualities of a *sthithaprajna*, or one who is firmly established in wisdom.

Even with this help, not all can discern a true Master, For there are several clever ones who can successfully deceive people - "wolves in the lamb's coat", as the Bible says. Here certain religious traditions have pointed to a higher law which can help. It is said that when the seeker is earnest in his efforts and ripe to receive the Master he is sure to arrive. The Bridegroom knocks and we have to be watchful. All that we can and ought to do lies in preparing to receive the Master.

The most potent means of self-preparation is the devout and intelligent study of the lives and teachings of the great Masters. The Master is the bridge between the human and the Divine, objectively. When a seeker reads his life, the human in the seeker intuits and intuitively contacts the Divine in himself and the inner bridge is thus built. When the process is complete, his accomplishment is corroborated by the external contact with the Master and eventually, the external and the internal become one. The Master is thus within (as "the Kingdom of heaven" is) and without (as the Christ is) too. The Master and the seeker thus become one in the Spirit.

In the earlier stages of such reading, the seeker is charmed by a vision, in the Master, of his own infinite spiritual potentialities being realized and is thus spurred on to zealous, optimistic endeavour. The infinite power and love of the Master grips the seeker's heart in steadfast devotion. From the lay stage of craving for worldly good in prayer, he becomes a true seeker of the Divine which is Love and Bliss, for its own sake. Such a one would most willingly bear the cross of worldly suffering, his heart set on the goal, the end of all sorrow, and follow the Master. Let us remember that all true Hindu, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims are people who are drawn to true religion by the lives of the sages, the Buddhas, the Christ and the Prophet. This tradition is represented by the works, *Sri Gurucharitra* in Maharashtra (India), and by *Periyapuranam* in Tamilnadu. In ancient India *The Gurugita* and *The Bhagavata* were widely used for the purpose. The instances of readers who were divinely directed to their Masters by such study are legion. The most famous is the instance of young Venkataraman being galvanized into an ardent seeker by a study of The Periyapuranam and, after his subsequent Self-realization which can be traced to it, he became famous as *Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

The immediate presence of a sage is a myriad times more effective than all of one's own spiritual endeavours. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Sri Ramana Maharshi were emphatic about it. But such association is not possible for all to the needed extent. To one such, Sri Ramana Maharshi said, "*Satsang* is association with the Divine Reality which is eternal and omnipresent. To be aware of it at all times is *satsang*. Devout study of lives of those who are realized too can constitute *satsang*, or association with the enlightened ones."

To most of us, the study of the lives of perfect masters is even more effective. For human nature being such, even when we live with a sage, we tend to focus our attention more on his physical frame than on his realization which is the essence of it all. Even the apostles of Christ faltered when their boat was tossed by a storm and the Christ chid them as those of "little faith". Arjuna confesses to such an error in regard to Krishna in *The Bhagavadgita*. But when we study the life of a Master, we unfalteringly focus our attention on the Supreme wisdom-in-action which is the Master. Thereby, we are trained to do the same when we eventually contact a living Master, as it happened in the case of Sai Baba; or our contact with the Master might remain at a purely spiritual level and alchemise us, as happened in the case of Sri Ramana Maharshi. For when a devotee asked the sage how he happened to realize without the help of a *guru*, he said that he too had one, though not in the form which the devotee expected.

IV

In this context, the life of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, I feel, is unique. He does not merely teach about the omnipresent Spirit. Indeed, his verbal teaching is minimal. For there are scriptures galore to do that. But mere verbal teaching cannot strike deep root in the hearts of common folk. Sri Sai Baba has therefore taught through direct experiences. He baptized mostly through the Holy Ghost. He showed unerring, at-one-ment with all gods of Hindus, all saints, all creatures and even with so-called inanimate objects. He was ever aware of what transpired within and without his devotees everywhere. His devotees had no choice but to be aware of an omnipresent and omniscient Baba. The result is that at one stroke, their conduct and attitude to fellow-creatures were bound to conform to the highest codes of altruism. Wherever the devotee was, he was made to recognize that Baba was, in spirit, with him indeed. The implications of this aspect of Baba are rich beyond measure. The heart of all spiritual endeavour is to cultivate the presence of the Spirit uninterruptedly and this was secured for the Sai devotee - how remarkably, the succeeding chapters illustrate.

Beside this, the manifestation of the Spirit as Sri Sai Baba is unique in another respect. No one knows his caste, creed, or parentage. This anonymity lent a strange facet to his teaching. To the Hindus he was an orthodox brahmin with sacred fire, enjoining the worship of the many gods and the devout study of various Hindu scriptures; he even named the mosque as *Dwarakamai* and planted the *Tulasi* in its frontyard and then allowed himself to be worshipped by his devotees in the Hindu fashion. To the moslems, he was a moslem, a *pir*, living in a mosque, observing the discipline enjoined for a *fakir*, always uttering the Islamic *Allah Malik*, guiding moslem seekers like Abdul Baba along the Islamic line. To the Parsis, he was the sacred fire-worshipper. His life, too, is a living manifestation of the Sermon of the Christ and of the eight fold path of the Buddha. Thus, in him we have a perfect model of harmony of all religions for whom this world, with all its sectarian and religious antagonisms, has been looking forward.

A third feature that specially belongs to him is this: Most of the religious scriptures and holy men seem to suggest that one ought not to aspire for this or that material goal, in being devoted to a *guru* or god. Sri Sai Baba never laid down such a rule. Indeed, once, when a self-assured devotee dissuaded a few visitors who came to Sai Baba for the fulfilment of material needs, the Master told him not do so.

The fourth unique feature is the phenomenally large number of instances in which the great *fakir* has been physically appearing before his devotees, even decades after his *mahasamadhi* literally fulfilling his verbal assurance on the great event.

V

The writer expresses his thanks to the Sai Baba Samsthan, Shirdi, All India Sai Samaj, Madras and Sai Spiritual Centre, Bangalore, for the kind permission accorded to him to utilize the material available in all their publications and journals. Thanks are also due to all other writers of books published in Hindi, Gujarathi and Marathi for the material drawn from them. My special thanks go to those devotees of Baba, like Sri Marthand Mahalsapathi, Sri Nanasaheb Rasne, late Sri Sai Sharananandaji, who shared the reminiscences of their life in the immediate presence of

Baba. Finally, I acknowledge with thanks the immense assistance extended to me by Sri Sivanesan Swami of Shirdi in reading out to me from the back numbers of "Sai Leela" (Marathi), the official organ of the Sai Samsthan, Shirdi.

The Master Calls Me

My quest for truth was awakened by the tragic demise of my nephew in 1955 on the occasion of my initiation (sacred thread) ceremony. Now I see, in retrospect, that it was indeed an initiation. The initial heartbreak had left and, in its wake, several fundamental questions arose in me: "Is there a Supreme Spirit? What is the nature? How can we contact it? What is life? What is death? Is there a soul? Why hasn't man found a way out of death? What is Time?" and such others. The search went on unanswered till 1960. One evening in that year, when I was taking a stroll, something mysterious occurred somewhere deep in me and all the questions vanished in a trice and peace prevailed. These questions seemed out of place, of no value any longer. A book on Zen which came to my hand quite unasked for, contained a description of inner illumination or *satori* which came nearest to my experience. It was a pleasant surprise and a promise. The quest took on a richer hue.

In 1963, my elder brother Sri E. Vedavyas invited me to join him on his visit to Shirdi. Though I had little faith in saints at that time, I consented just to give him my company. On the 8th of February we reached Shirdi at sunset and we went straight to the *samadhi mandir* to attend the *arti*. The deep faith that shone on the faces of the congregation for the saint who left off his physical frame nearly half a century ago, was surprise to me. Soon after, the devotees dispersed and the shrine was mostly empty. My brother showed me the tomb at close quarters and told me that Shri Baba's mortal remains were kept in it. That being my first close look of a tomb, I was shocked. My first reaction was to imagine in what a putrefied condition the body must have
been. The marble structure of the tomb and the profuse incense that was burnt there made me suppose that it was intended to keep out any stench that might possibly leak out. The thought was revolting and nauseating. I at once took leave of my brother and slept in the room, unable even to relish food, in the wake of the shock.

Next morning, a keen apetite woke me up and I made straight for the Madras hotel. As I passed before the *samadhi mandir*, I found that the morning *arti* was over and the place was almost vacant. The sight of the marble statue over the *samadhi* attracted my attention and I wanted to have a close look at the form that continues to charm so many devotees. I stepped in and stood at a little distance from the statue and looked at it. It is quite life-like and I felt that the saint must have looked precisely like that. The sculptor must have been divinely inspired in capturing that mysterious smile and the inward look. The look captured my gaze. "What does his face, especially his look and smile, indicate of his attitude? Was he elated that so many visited him to pay their homage, adore and worship him? Or was he overwhelmed with compassion for them? Or, in that mood, was he oblivious of his separate existence, his gaze fixed on the divine
mystery, the one omnipresent spirit? Or was it a look of recognition of that ancient spirit, of his contacts with those teeming crowds that had contacted him through their countless previous

lives? And, was that smile of reunion pregnant with his joy of their future possibility of reaching the spiritual summit? Or was he just oblivious of all this, lost in his ceaseless contemplation of the one spirit, in his at-one-ment? And is the mysterious Monolisa-smile a manifestation of that peace which passeth understanding? Or is there a possibility that at a higher level of consciousness all these attitudes could coexist without the one interrupting the other?"

This last thought flashed with a particular intensity and my spirit leapt forth to comprehend how, in that state, he was viewing all this existence: "Is the universe of myriad forms an image projected in his consciousness? And am I, then, too, a thought in his Mind and are all these my thoughts parts of it?" The intuition took off and wafted my being into far-off states. I knew of nothing else. My being was still, taut with a particular illumination and my thoughts were both existent and non-existent. I am aware how absurd these words must look to anyone. But what else can they be when I verbalize what cannot be conveyed?

Quite some time lapsed in that timeless moment and I was knocked back into normal awareness by what they felt to me like a rude knocking on my shoulders. It was then that I realized that I was seated and that my eyes were shut, that my cheeks were wet with half-dried tears. The shrine was quite noisy and crowded. I saw my brother patting me gently and asking, "You are still seated here! Had your bath and breakfast? It's almost lunch time. It's better to finish our lunch." His words were quite audible but I found it hard to catch the sense, as though I was abruptly awakened from deep sleep. It was quite disturbing even to endeavour to understand the words
and still more to respond, the spirit being totally unwilling to be called out from the heart of peace. It was much easier to just obey what he said. It was nearly four hours since I stepped into the shrine which was getting crowded as the time for noon *arti* was nearing and the devotees were queing up for finishing *abhishek!* We walked down to the dining hall but to me it was as though the walk were just a vivid reverie. My mind was all set on sinking back into the state of peace and bliss from which it was roused and with which the connection was not yet completely snapped. It was quite a task to pay particular attention to things and persons.

This mood was persistent and had never quite left me during the brief stay of two days at Shirdi. Perhaps my brother had found out that something unusual was happening to me. "You may go over here again later if you want to, but now we have to go back!" he said. And we were back.

The significant thing, as I see it now in retrospect, is that the spiritual connection with that deeper level of being, continued for months after our return from Shirdi. My mind, when it now and then relapsed into normal awareness, quite instinctively identified that deeper level of Being with Baba. Mostly I was in a continuous state of ineffable peace and quiet and the normal activities of the day were powerless to interrupt it. Days passed as a continuous moment of timelessness; it was as though all things around, including my body, were all parts of a whole which is conscious and aware. Whenever the world around had plucked me into the every day reality, my spirit, once again, at the earliest possible, was summoned back to its pristine state by the vivid appearance of the marble image at Shirdi before my mind's eye. And then objects and creatures all around would seem to be crystallizations of a pervasive consciousness.

This experience was accompanied by a remarkable change in my physical constitution. My lean frame got filled in with flesh to robustness and I was brimming with energy which was not lowered by late hours of reading at night or by missing my meal now and then. There was a strong urge to walk and walk, almost endlessly, through most of the day and I was not tired. My mind was engrossed in the blissful peace and was not stirred by the traffic on the road. My mind, too, seemed to have grown unusually penetrating. For, the most vexatious of meta-physical questions got cleared in a wink and there seemed practically nothing which it could not comprehend. Often knowledge concerning my friends who were far off, or of the thoughts that passed through my associates' minds broke in and then I was no less surprised at it than they. Strangely enough, the pervasive peace was shared by all those around me. It was definite that my life turned a corner. The steady current of this experience has ever continued, sometimes quite vivid and sometimes a little less so.

After three or four months followed my second visit to Shirdi. This time no such spectacular experience occurred but I keenly felt that I was visiting a saint who has been my guiding Spirit through lives, that he was somehow connected with my initiation into the quest for knowledge eight years earlier. There was only an intense personal attachment to the Master, and the sense of not having the good fortune of seeing Him in flesh and blood in this life. "What could have happened then? Now that I cannot hope for this, could I at least see any living saint? What would be his impact on me?" This was the object of my prayer at Baba's *samadhi mandir*.

The response was prompt and striking, as has always been characteristic of him. During the years that followed, I could come into close contact with numerous saints and bask in their blessings: Mother Anasuyadevi of Jillellamudi, Sri Ranganna Babu (a great Ramabhaktha of Guntur), the late Avadhuta Swami of Chirala, the *guru* of the Chinthapalli forests of Sileru area, Sri Swami Purnananda of Srisailam, his *guru* Sri Rakhadi Baba who stayed at Ganeshpuri, Sri Satya Sai Baba, the two Balayogis of Mummidivaram, the Senior Sankaracharyaji of Kanchi, Sri Ma Anandamayi, Sri Akhandananda Saraswati of Muthra, the recluse saints of Kalahasthi and Cuddapah, the recluse woman saint of Chivatam, Sri Samartha Narayana Maharaj of Harihar,
and the Saint of Poondi. Besides, I had *darshan* of some famous devotees of Sri Sai Baba. I saw others like Mother Revati Amma of Madras, and Sri Gulab Maharaj of Nagpur. It is not possible to detail here my experiences with these saints, but one significant feature in all these was I could win their gracious attention only after specifically praying to Sri Baba for the same. Baba was thus once more proving three things simultaneously; he is still alive in spirit and would gladly bless us with the best at our hearty praying; that he is still one with the being of the saints of
today even as he was when he lived in flesh and blood; that he can be a competent *guru* or Master (*Samarth Sadguru*) to his ardent devotee even today. For a time, a few friends told me that I was on a "saint-gathering" spree and not stabilized on any one. I was not effected by this criticism. Now in retrospect, I am happy to find that, fortunately, my faith in Baba, if anything, grew deeper and has been constant all through. Baba's invisible hand was leading me to act according to the scriptural injunction;

मधुलुब्धो यथा भृंगः पुष्पात्पुष्पान्तरं व्रजेत् ।
ज्ञानलुब्धस्तथाशिष्यः गुरोर्गुर्वन्तरं व्रजेत् ।।

"Just as the bee which is fond of honey moves from flower to flower, the disciple who is fond of wisdom goes from Master (*Guru*) to Master".

- Sree Gurugita.

I shall mention a few instances of Baba's grace during these years.

In 1968 I resigned my job and lived at the *ashram* of a mother for an year. After that, on a specific indication from Baba I left the *ashram* and settled in my present job here, at Vidyanagar. At first I was very much disappointed with the life here which had stifled my spiritual longings. There was none who shared my aspirations, none to join me in *satsang*. Life looked dreary and barren even like the rocky soil here. I yearningly prayed to Baba either to take me to a place where I could have *satsang* or to secure it here for me. Within a few months there was Baba's response in the most seemingly casual manner. A Christian boy, a student, started criticizing me for adoring a human being like Sai Baba. A discussion ensued which went on for days and drew large numbers of students to participate in it. Out of these a small group took shape and decided to have weekly *satsang* (devotional or spiritual gathering) on Thursdays for *bhajan*. The *bhajan*, by the grace of Baba, has been going on for the last nine years without interruption even for one week. The situation was so moulded that I happened to rent the house myself, Baba's grace has been manifesting in the most miraculous ways to the participants in the *bhajan*.

One Thursday, after *bhajan*, Baba inspired me to declare to the participants: "if all of us pray with all our hearts, great saints would come here and bless us instead of our going to them. We are sure to come into contact with great saints." Baba has been keeping up his word as illustrated below.

In 1971, I started for Mummidivaram (in East Godavari Dt. A.P.) to have *darshan* of Sri Balayogi on the holy *Sivaratri* day. On the way I stopped at Guntur to see Sri Ranganna Babu, a great devotee of Sri Rama, and invite him to visit Vidyanagar. "I shall seek the permission of my *guru* Sri Rama and, if he permits me, I shall go to Vidyanagar. It is not in my hands to say 'yes' or 'no'. Many eminent people come from Hyderabad, Madras and other place to take me there
but generally Sri Rama does not permit me to go", he replied. I said, "I shall see you again on my way back from Mummidivaram. You please ask Sri Rama. If he is pleased with the devotion of the students at Vidyanagar, he would agree", and took leave of him. All that I could do was to pray to Baba. He demonstrated while he was in flesh that he was all the saints and gods. So he should inspire Sri Ranganna Babu through Sri Rama to visit my place.

Again the response was striking. On the third day, I saw Sri Ranganna Babu on my return journey. He was the first to greet me gleefully, "Sir, Sri Rama has permitted me to go with you!
'Ranganna', he said, the students at Vidyanagar, are doing *bhajan* with devotion. Go, see them'. And he gave me grapes to be distributed to the devotees!" So saying he at once started with me.

He had spent two days at Vidyanagar, stepped on a plot of land and said, "Here would spring up an *ashram* and a *mandir!* Great yogis will visit this place and great religious ceremonies like *yagnas* will be performed here.

Another instance: On the evening of 26th July, 1975, we were doing *satsang* at my house. I was reading out to the gathering the chapter entitled, "Sri Sai is in All Saints" from my present book on Baba. Just then we had finished reading the *leela* (miracle) of Baba's transfiguration as Sri Guru Gholapswami to one Mule Sastry. A small van stopped before my house and some one there announced, "The Swami has come!" When I came out I saw the saint Sri Samarth Narayana Maharaj of Harihar. He entered our *satsang* hall, sat on my mat (*darbhasana*) and blessed us with his presence for full two hours. He too said, "Here will spring up a fine *mandir* and great souls will come and stay here". Sri Narayana Maharaj is the twelfth incumbent of the seat at Harihar and he belongs to the tradition of Sri Samarth Ramadas, the guru of Shivaji.

The same saint afforded us another proof that the strength of devotion of our group was mainly responsible for the arrival of great saints to these parts. From 11-12-1975 to 23-12-1975 he performed a *yagna* at Vakadu (four miles from here). Our group visited him there everyday. On the 20th, a member of our group was meditating in his presence. The swami then told him, "As you people here are doing *dhyana* and performing *satsang* and *bhajan* with devotion, I happened to come here from afar to perform this *yagna*." The next day when his disciples were dispersing the crowds, he said to them, "The disciples of Bharadwaja would be coming here. Let them sit here and meditate". Henceforth none from our group was ever asked by his disciples to clear off from that place.

Now a few instances to show how Sri Sai Baba had established his claim over me as his own. Sometime before I came to Vidyanagar (i.e., when I was at the *ashram* of a Mother) I happened to go to Naimisaranya to take *darshan* of Sri Ma Anandamayi who was conducting a *Bhagawata Saptaha* there. The Swamiji who was giving the exposition, in the course of his talk one day said that only a living sage can lead us to Enlightenment or liberation and that one who had shed his body, however great, can at best bless us with material welfare only. This raised a question regarding the efficacy of my devotion to Sri Sai though I did not give it up.

Sometime after my arrival at Vidyanagar, an old student of mine in Hyderabad visited me and invited me to his house in Pune on my next visit to Shirdi. I casually agreed. I subsequently visited Shirdi with the idea of staying there for a week. But from the second day of my stay at Shirdi, all my mind was strongly driving me to visit Pune. Finding it useless to confine my body at Shirdi any longer, I at last arrived there. My friend was away at his office and I resolved to go round the city before he returned home. On the way the sight of a flower-shop made me inquire whether there was any great saint in Pune. A gentleman told me that there was Gulavani Maharaj, a disciple of Sri Vasudevananda Saraswathi (alias Sri Tembe Swami). I at once visited him with a simple offering. When he saw me prostrating, he addressed me, "Oh! You are the
child of Sai Baba". Thrilled at this uncanny knowledge, I expressed my doubts about the efficacy of my devotion to Sri Sai, a saint who had shed his physical body more than half a century ago. He said that Sri Sai Baba is not a mere saint but a manifestation of Lord Dattatreya, that he has been guiding seekers spiritually even after his *mahasamadhi* and even manifesting himself physically before some; that I was, on the right path and that I need no other guide.

Some time later, a saint of about 55 years appeared in my dream. Though his form was quite different, I had the vivid feeling that he was Sai Baba. He embraced me and said thrice, "Why worry that you don't have a *guru*? I am here?"

Again, during the holy *Navarathri* days of 1970, I happened to visit Puttaparthi with another friend, Mr. E.V.Krishna Rao. As, at that time, I was in a hospital laid up with typhoid, the friend took me all the way from Chirala in a taxi at great expense to himself. On our arrival there we were told that Sri Satyasai Baba does not grant interviews during those nine days. I was anxious for my friend who incurred heavy expense for the trip. I prayed to Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi. That very day Sri Satyasai Baba granted us an interview along with two Nepalese and two foreigners! He told me, "Sri Sai Baba's grace is ever with you. You need fear nothing".

I cannot refrain from mentioning another experience. On the holy day of *Sivarathri* in 1975, I had finished my worship. At about 8.30 a.m., I had a strong urge to take *darshan* of one great saint, Sri Venkaiah Avadhuta at a village named Golagamudi. I called one of my students, Ramakrishna whose father was a devotee of this saint and asked him to join me. Ramakrishna said that the saint does not stay in any place for more than three or four days and that we had better enquire whether he was in that village. But I prayed to Sai, "Baba! I want to take *darshan* of your manifestation, Sri Venkaiah Swami. Please bless me to have his *darshan* and special blessings". I burned incense before Baba's picture and left for that village. On our way another bus which was to take us there crossed; we got into it. In it there were a few *sadhus* who carried
a stringed musical instrument which belonged to the saint. They told us that the holy one came to Nellore some four days earlier and that he decided to stay there for full ten days, but at 8.30 a.m., that day, he suddenly started for Golagamudi. He reached there just half an hour before our arrival. Owing to the sudden change of his plans no other devotees visited him and we two sat in his presence for full six hours. At the end of it he blessed us.

I will conclude this chapter with an instance of how Baba has been actively guiding me in my material life also. Owing to my keen reflection on joy and sorrow in life I came to a decision to remain a celebate all my life and dedicate all my energies to the spiritual quest. Even my father had stopped pressing me to get married. This was before I stayed at the *ashram*.

At that time I used to visit a recluse saint at a nearby town, Chirala. He was a perfect *Avadhuta*. One day when I saw him, he gave me an old, dark nylon sari with which some generous soul probably covered him the previous night to protect him from the winter cold. He told me to cover myself with it and to keep it with me. Some friends later remarked that the saint indicated that I should get married but I was not convinced. After a year or so I happened to visit a celebate saint who lived in the thick forests of Chinthapalli range who explicitly told me that I should get married in view of my *karmic* ties since a former life and that I had better clear them off. After
he attained *niryana* (shedding his physical frame) I had a doubt. The saint was known to my father and my eldest brother. Could he have counselled me to oblige my father? But there was no way of ascertaining the truth. In 1973, I visited Shirdi to pray for explicit guidance in the matter.
I stayed there for a week, spending all my time in circumambulating the *samadhi* (tomb), devout study of Baba's life and prayer. On the seventh day, which happened to be the holy
Vijayadasami (*dassera* festival) the anniversary of Baba's *mahasamadhi* was being celebrated I

finished my chosen routine by midnight and I waited near Baba's *samadhi* for half an hour but I did not receive any message from Baba.

Tired with the day's routine I relaxed in the nearby park. Within five minutes a bespectacled gentlemen approached me and said, "One great man is staying with me in my room. He is one Puran Dalayi from Bombay. He wants you to see him. I am Roy from Calcutta". I was at first surprised by the unsolicited greeting. I even suspected that probably some smuggler must have mistaken me, from my midnight walk for one of his own tribe and thus was seeking to establish contact with me. However, I wished to see what it was and I at once went to his room which was nearby. An elderly man of about 55 or 60 was standing before a room in which there was no light. At my approach he entered the room, switched on the light and turned round. I was amazed to find before me a man who seemed an exact replica of the forest-dwelling Swami (of Chinthapalli) who was no more! Only when this gentleman addressed me in Hindi did I realize that this was a different man. He said, "Sai Baba appears before me in my *dhyana*. Today I paid my respects to the *samadhi* and sat here in our room for mediation. Baba appeared before me and said, 'One of my devotees is doing *pradakshina* (circumambulation) to my *samadhi* for a message from me'. Convey this, my message, to him at once!" Saying thus he gave me a message. I told Baba that it was not possible for me to identify the said devotee in that crowd, and so I said I would go and sit in the nearby park and I would deliver the message to whosoever comes there within five minutes of my sitting there. Should no one come, it is not my business. 'So you should impel the said devotee to go over there within that time'. So saying, I sat in the park. You came within that time and so I had sent for you and came here. Here we can have privacy. Now, young man, what is your problem for which you want a message from Baba?" "I am sorry to say so but I do not want to share my problem with anyone except Baba. If you tell me the message which he wished you to convey to me, I shall see whether it is connected with my problem and, If so, I shall accept it". The old man smiled and said, "You wished to know what Baba has to say regarding the question of your marriage. Baba wants me to tell you that you should get married and that thereby your *karmic* ties would be worked out." "Yes, that was the issue I had in mind", I confessed. "After your marriage both of you should come to Shirdi and serve Baba for at least a week. That's baba's pleasure," he added. Accordingly, my marriage took place on the 6th of March, 1975 and on the 14th of April, my wife and I visited Shirdi and stayed in his service for two weeks.

Sri Sai Baba - A Sketch of His Life (I)

Sai Baba, one of the foremost saints of modern India, lived in the little village of Shirdi in the State of Maharashtra for sixty years and elevated it to the status of a great spiritual center. He never stirred out of that village during this long period except for visits to two villages, Neemgaon and Rahata, three miles on either side of Shirdi. He never preached, toured, nor discoursed. He never advertised himself. He rather shunned and discouraged unnecessary publicity. Yet by the sheer brilliance of his spiritual fire he did draw innumerable devotees to him from all over the country, irrespective of their caste or creed. When he took *samadhi* in 1918 (i.e., left off his physical body) he never installed anyone as a successor to his spiritual throne at

Shirdi. Yet his very power to mould and develop his devotees spiritually is such that even more than 50 years after his *samadhi*, Sai Baba is still a dynamic spiritual force which countless Indians invoke for their spiritual and material welfare. No wonder many of the new borns in our country are named after this great God-man and hundreds of his shrines have been built and are being visited by his devotees all over India. Many more are in the offing. Many books have been written of him in various Indian languages.

What is of special relevance to present day India in Sai Baba's gospel and example is that religious and communal differences are meaningless in matters of the spirit.

Yet surprising as it may sound, a god-man of his stature and fame is without a name. No one knows his original name, time and place of birth, his religion and caste, not even of his parents. He never revealed the same to anybody. 'Sai Baba', the name by which he came to be known, is what has been used by one of his first devotees to greet him on his second arrival at Shirdi. 'Sai' means 'saint' and 'Baba' means 'father'. The name is thus just an expression of love and reverence due to such a spiritual giant as he, and is not a personal name. He allowed himself to be addressed as such, ever since.

All that we definitely know of Sai Baba is that his arrival at Shirdi was very sudden. One day he appeared as a boy of sixteen or seventeen, seated under a neem (or margosa) tree in the outskirts of the village of Shirdi, about the year 1854 [1]. However, even this date is not definitely noted.

An old woman of Shirdi, mother of one Nana Chopdar described him thus - "This young lad, fair, smart and very handsome, was first seen under the neem tree, seated in an *asana*. The people of the village were wonder-struck to see such a young lad practicing hard penance, not minding heat and cold. By day he associated with none, by night he was afraid of nobody. People were wondering and asking whence this young chap turned up. His form and features were so beautiful that a mere look endeared him to all. He went to nobody's door, but always sat near the neem tree. Outwardly he looked very young but by his action He was really a great soul. He was the embodiment of dispassion and was an enigma to all. One day it so happened that God Khandoba [2] possessed the body of some devotee and people began to ask him "*Deva* (god), you please tell us what blessed father's son is this lad and whence did he come?" God Khandoba asked them to bring a pick-axe and dig in a particular place. When it was dug, bricks were found and underneath that, a flat stone. When the stone was removed, a corridor was seen in which four *samayis* (earthen lamps) were burning. The corridor led to a cellar where cow-mouth shaped structures, wooden boards and necklaces were seen. Khandoba said, " 'This lad practiced
penance here for 12 years'. Then the people began to question the lad about this. He put them off the scent by telling them that this was his *guru's* place, his holy *watan* (tomb or resting place), and requested them to guard it well. The people then closed the corridor as before." [3]

"Mahalsapathy was probably the first to introduce himself to Sri Sai Baba; he was so much impressed with the conversation he had with Baba that he thereafter saw him daily and introduced baba to his friends, Kasinath the tailor and Appa Jogle, saying that a *fakir* Sai Baba had made a sudden appearance on the outskirts of the village near the debris of the village wall, that he is far above the common man, a pure and holy man worth paying respects to. From that time onwards he came to be known as Sai Baba. This trio-Mahalspathy, Kasinath and Joge-daily

went to Baba, paid their respects to him and supplied whatever little requirements he had. The news that one Sai Baba had manifested himself near the nimb (neem) tree on the outskirts of the village reached the ears of the late Appa Patil Kote and one day he, with his wife, went to Baba to pay his respects. He (Baba) left his seat, got up and welcomed Appa and told his wife that she had been veritably his sister. The lady Bayajibai, on seeing Baba, was so much impressed that she there and then resolved never to take her food without first feeding Baba." [4]

At first Sai Baba prescribed and gave medicines to the ailing visitors who sought his help but never charged nor accepted any money for the same. Not only that; if he found that there was none to look after or nurse the patient, he would himself be the nurse and serve him. Once it so happened that his patient failed to observe the rules of diet, etc., that Sai Baba had prescribed and henceforth Baba gave up administering medicine and gave only his '*udi*' or holy ashes for their relief.

Raghuji Gannapat Scinde Patel refers to this incident in his account: "As soon as Baba came to Shirdi, one Amanbhai, a Moslem gave him food. That Amanbhai was visiting my *mavusi's* (grand mother's) house occasionally. Her son Ganapat Hari Kanade, aged thirty five, had leprosy and fever. Amanbhai told her that a holy man had come to his house and that he could treat her son. Then Baba came in and saw the patient and told Ganapat to catch a cobra courageously, as the cobra would not bite a leper. Ganapat caught a cobra and out of its poison, the medicine was prepared and given to Ganapat. He began to improve in a few days. But he did not observe Baba's injunction to avoid sex-pleasures. So Baba stopped giving him further treatment. The disease developed and Ganapat died.

Baba came to this very house to treat my younger brother Bhagoji, who was suffering from fever, at a very critical period, when death was imminent. Baba gave him some medicine and further had him branded with red-hot irons (one on each temple and one on the back). Bhagoji recovered his health, escaped death and fever."

Young ‘Sai Baba’ (even this title was not conferred on him by that time) stayed under the neem tree for about three years but suddenly left Shirdi. No one knew where he went or why. After a year or so, he again returned to Shirdi and stayed on there till his *mahasamadhi* in 1918 i.e., for sixty years.

Where Saibaba was during the interval between his first and second visits to Shirdi is not definitely known. However, some vague hints are given by some devotees. For instance, Amoolchand Chandrabhan Seth of Rahata says, “My elder cousin Khusal Bhav who died on 5-11-1918 has told me that Sai Baba lived in a *chavadi* (now in ruins) at Rahata for some months or so; that previously Sai Baba lived with a Moslem saint Ali (Akbar Ali perhaps) whose portrait is still kept in our *gin* i.e., ‘Rahatekar’s *gin*’ near Wadia Park at Ahmednagar; that Daulu Sait had seen Baba with the saint at Ahmednagar and that Baba came from Ahmednagar to live at Rahata and then went to live at Shirdi.” (“Devotees’ Experiences”)

The Divine Ministration

D.D. Nanasaheb Rasne who served Baba for nearly two decades has told the author of a remarkable incident in this period of Baba’s life as recounted to him by Saint Gadge Maharaj himself.

Sri Gadge Maharaj (alias Sri Guzadi Maharaj) a famous saint of Maharashtra, was serving in a provision store at Sivagaon Pathadi. One day Sai Baba came there from Selu Manvat and begged for *roti*. When no one gave him any, he picked an ear of Jawar from a ripe farm and went away, munching it. Gadge went home on leave, picked up *roti* and proceeded in search of the *fakir*. At last, he found the latter sitting under a tree in a nearby jungle. The *fakir* demanded, “Why have you come here?”

“I noticed that they hadn’t offered you *roti*, and so I got it for you.”

“Will you give me whatever I demand?”

“You may ask for anything except money which I don’t have”.

“I need your life. Give it.”

“How can I take it out and offer you? Take it by your hand, I am ready!”

The *fakir* then kept his hand on Gadge’s head in blessing. The latter, instantly galvanized with intense renunciation, at once went back, bade goodbye to his family and rushed to his *guru* who, in the meanwhile, went ahead. When baba saw him he was wild and roared, “Rogue, why have you come to trouble me further?”

“I cannot part from you!” Gadge submitted.

Baba then led him to the nearby tomb of a Moslem saint, commanded Gadge to dig a small pit nearby and fill it with two pots-full of water. Getting down into that, Baba sipped a little of the

water and directed the other to do the same. Gadge obeyed and at once grew oblivious of everything in a deep yogic trance. By the time he regained his sense, Baba had left.

Subsequently, Gadge reached Shirdi. Baba was at the mosque and the curtains within were lowered. Gadge lifted a curtain up and peeped in. Baba grew wild and cried, "Bastard, have you come to eat my bones, having already eaten my flesh? Why trouble me even after I gave you what I have?" When Gadge said that he would not leave him, Baba flung a brick at him. It struck the former on his brow, leaving a permanent crescent mark. Baba then calmed down and said, "You're fully blessed and will henceforth be a *sadguru*. God will bless you". Gadge instantly attained perfect Enlightenment.

Long after, on the eve of his *mahasamadhi*, Sadguru Gadge Maharaj visited Shirdi singing, *"Ham jato Amche Gaona"* ("I am going to my original abode") . He swept the village clean, sang Bhajans and told his devotees, "We shall never meet again. I am going away!" Then he proceeded, singing, to the bank of river Narmada and attained *mahasamadhi*.

It should be mentioned here that Sri Gadge Maharaj, besides ministering spiritually to countless devotees, has also left behind several charitable and educational institutions in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

This account gives us an inkling of what Baba was and did even during the interval between his first and second arrival at Shirdi.

The second advent of Baba at Shirdi is interesting to note. Chand Patil was a wealthy gentleman of Dhoop village in Aurangabad district. On one of his trips to Aurangabad, the horse which he was riding strayed and could not be found. He was very fond of the animal and so he searched for it carefully for two months, but he could not find it. At last, while he was returning home by walk, carrying the saddle with him as a memento of the animal, he saw a *fakir* sitting under a tree by the road. The *fakir* wore a long gown, and a cap and had a small stick in his hand. He beckoned to Chand Patil to come and rest in the shade of the tree for a while and enquired of him, why he carried the saddle and what he was searching for. When Chand Patil told him of his missing animal, the *fakir* smiled and asked him to search for it near a stream. Chand Patil was

surprised to see the animal in the same spot where he could not find it a little earlier; when he returned to the *fakir* in great joy, the latter told him to share a puff from his *chilm*. The tobacco and the clay-pipe were ready with him but he had neither fire to light it, nor water to wet the cloth (through which the smoke is to be sucked). Then the *fakir* struck the ground with his stick and there emerged a burning ember, from the earth! After lighting the pipe with it, the *fakir* again struck the ground with the stick and water bubbled from the same spot!! The *fakir* wetted a piece of cloth in it and, using it as a filter, he puffed the smoke and offered it to Chand Patil. The latter was already stunned by the miraculous power of the *fakir* and he accepted the clay pipe as a sign of blessing from the powerful saint. Then he touched the feet of the *fakir* in reverence and begged him to grace his house with his visit. The *fakir* agreed and followed Chand Patil to his house.

After some time, when the Patil had to attend the marriage of one of his nephews at Shirdi, he requested the *fakir* to grace the occasion. Accordingly the whole party arrived at Shirdi. The bullock carts halted at the outskirts of the village. When the *fakir* alighted from one of these, Mahalsapathy, a priest in the village temple, recognized the great saint to be the same as the lad who appeared sitting under the neam tree a few years earlier and greeted him with the words ***"Ya Sai"*** **("Welcome Saint")**. Henceforth, he came to be known as 'Sai Baba' ('Saint father').

Ramgir Bua, a devotee of Sai Baba writes about Sai Baba's second arrival at Shirdi:-

"As a boy I studied in the school at Shirdi. I was a pupil when Sai Baba came to Shirdi. He was then accompanied by one Patel of Dhupkheda who came to settle the marriage of a girl with Hamid, the son of Aminbhai of Shirdi. Baba appeared to be 25 or 30 years old at that time. He stayed there as a guest of Aminbhai. He had long hair flowing down to his buttocks. He wore a green *kufni*, a skullcap next to his hair and over it a *bagawi topi* (*kashaya* or ochre coloured cap): he carried a *danda* (a small baton) in his hand along with a *chilm* pipe and match box... He got his bread by begging." ("Devotees' Experiences").

Four or five months after his arrival at Shirdi, Baba started wearing a white gown and head- dress. Even after his second advent at Shirdi, Sai baba seemed to have lived under the neem tree for some time and a particular incident was responsible for Baba's changing his residence to the old dilapidated mosque in the village. The details of the incidents that I could gather, are as follows:

Once there were very heavy rains at Shirdi and a large portion of it was flooded. After a long while some of his very early devotees remembered the homeless *fakir* and wanted to see how he fared and where he took shelter from the rain. Mahalsapathy and a few others rushed to the margosa tree and were stunned to see that Sai Baba was there under the same tree, half-reclining, in a state of *samadhi*. Water flowed all over him. All the rubbish and filth gathered over his body. They dared not wake him up from that state. A few hours later, when the water had drained away, they returned to see him still lying on the damp earth; his body and face were completely covered with mud deposited by the receding water. They felt guilty at their gross neglect of his welfare all the time when he was their sole protector and guide in all their sufferings. Later, when he returned to the worldly place of consciousness, these devotees persuaded him to take shelter in the small, dilapidated mud-built mosque in the village. Probably the Hindu natives of the village felt that 'Sai baba' was a Moslem and so unfit to take shelter in Hindu temples as did the other Hindu saints like Janakidas and Devidas. This shift of his abode seemed to mark a change in his career. He burst into fame not long after this event.

One Tatya Baba Kote writes that before Sai Baba came to live in the mosque, he lived for some time in a jungle of thorny trees (*Babul* or *Acacia*) and that he was taken to be a madman by the village urchins who often stoned him. But he never got angry with them nor protested against their waywardness.

Thus the birth, parentage, religion, caste and the native place of Baba remained a mystery. Many people repeatedly asked him about these details but he quietly put them off the point with a smile. Once a thief who was arrested by the police told the Dhulia Court that he was given the valuable articles in his possession by Sai Baba of Shirdi. Then the Dhulia court sent a Commissioner to record Baba's replies to the inquiries. The inquiry went on thus:

"What is your Name?"

"They call me Sai baba".

"Your father's name?"

"Also Sai Baba".

"Your *guru*'s name?"

"Venkusa".

"Your religion?"

"Kabir".

"Caste or Community?"

"*Parvardigar*"(God).

"Your age?"

"Lakhs of years".

It is evident from these replies that Baba did not look upon himself as his body and so he never revealed anything of his early life to any devotee.

However, once he is reported to have told late Sri Mahalsapathy that he was born in a Brahmin family in the village of Patri and that at an early age he was given away by his parents to a *fakir*. Perhaps we should take it as a cryptic and allegorical statement that was characteristic of him. For instance, he always referred to God as "the merciful *Fakir*", He also said once, "I came here (to Shirdi) from Aurangabad. My *mama* (uncle) brought me down here". He once told Swami Sai Sharananandaji, "I was only eight years old when I left my parents and came to the Ganges. (Baba always referred to the Godavari River near Kopargaon as 'Ganges') Then I came to Shirdi". This is perhaps an instance of Baba identifying himself with Sripadavallabha the first manifestation of Lord Dattatreya who left his home at the early age of eight.

Dr. K.B. Gawankar, in his book on Sai Baba, has recorded a few more of Sai baba's reminiscences of his pre-Shirdi days. Once Sai baba told his devotees, Bade Baba and Bapugir Gosavi, "I grew up in Mahurgad (a holy place sanctified by the presence of Lord Dattatreya); when people pestered me I left for Girnar; there too people troubled me much and I left for Mount Abu. There too the same thing happened. Then I came to Akkalkot and from there to Daulatabad. There Janardana Swami (a great saint) did me a lot of *seva* (i.e. service). Then I went to Pandharpur; from there I came to Shirdi".

Dr. Gawankar also records a significant aspect of Sai Baba's life. Once Baba asked Smt. Kasibai Kanitkar, "Did Lord Datta give you anything at Kopergaon?" "No", she said.

"Do you know Sakharam Maharaj of Angaonkawad? (A famous saint of that place). He is my *guru bandhu*. We served the same *guru*. We planted two mango saplings there."

Next day, when Smt. Kasibai went to Kopergaon to see the saint Sri Sakharam Maharaj, he gave her two mangoes and said, "Sai Baba has sent these for you."

There is a mention in Sri Sakharam's biography of his frequent chattings with "a young *fakir*" who, according to Gawankar, was undoubtedly Sai Baba himself. It is also recorded that once Sakharam Maharaj told his devotees that he was going to his 'brother' and then he proceeded towards the river Kamode. Devotees who accompanied him thither saw a *fakir* on the opposite bank of the river. He was the *fakir aulia* of the Nizampur Dargah. They saw each other and

exchanged hearty smiles and returned to their respective abodes. Dr.Gawankar conjectures that it is possible that the *fakir aulia* was Sai Baba himself. Chronologically, this incident took place between Sai Baba's earlier disappearance at Shirdi and his second and permanent arrival there in 1858.

How dearly Sai Baba cherished this phase of his life can be seen from this incident: Bapusaheb Jog was a devotee of Sri Sakharam Maharaj. On one of his visits to the latter's *mutt* (monastery) at Angaonkawad, he saw the two mango trees that were mentioned earlier by Sri Sai Baba. On one of his later visits, jog plucked a mango from one of them as an offering to Sri Sai Baba but realized his error when he found it to be too unripe. Then he purchased two good fruits on his way for Sai Baba. Later when he offered the two ripe mangoes Sai Baba would not, take them! He only wanted the mango that Jog had plucked at Angaonkawad! When Sai Baba took it in his hands tears of joy flowed freely from his eyes. Baba examined it and said, "It is not yet ripe." Bapusaheb Jog said, "Yes, Baba." Sai Baba stared at it for a while and with a sportive sparkle in his eye said, "Is it so?" and ordered that it should be cut and distributed to all the devotees assembled there. Everyone was surprised to note that the mango was indeed ripe and sweet!

Another reference of Sai baba to his early life relates to his meeting with his Guru: "I found my master in the *chavadi* here. His calm, peaceful, cheerful and meditative face attracted me, almost bewitched me so much so that my eyes were rivetted on his face and even a moment's separation made me uneasy. In His company I used to forget even hunger and thirst. I served him with all my heart for more than 12 years. The duties I had imposed on myself for him were very arduous. He never left his seat for any purpose, not even to answer the calls of nature. Merged in mediation, he entirely forgot that he had a body, mind, etc. He ate, passed urine and stool there only, on his seat. I fed him, changed his clothes, swept and kept his seat always clean. As a reward for this he gave me his blessings saying, 'Wherever you are, here or even beyond the seven seas, I will ever be with you to guard and protect you'…..at the start he had asked me to pay his fees (*dakshina*); and on my asking what his fees were, he coolly said that his fee was
only two paise and these paise were not the government currency I had been using. His two paise consisted of two things, *nishta* (absolute faith) and *saboori* (cheerful patience). I readily gave him these two paise and though I was very eager to obtain from his holy mouth some holy spell or formula which I could go on chanting and repeating, he whispered nothing in my ears. He simply said, 'I shall ever be with you, protecting you by my mere glance, in the manner of a tortoise protecting its young ones.' The entire credit of all my glory goes to this *Guru*. It is the outcome of his blessings". [5]

"On another occasion", writes Swami Sai Sharananandaji in his book "Shri Sai, the Superman", "He (Sai Baba) said to this writer, 'My *guru's* name is Roshan Shah Mia' ". The same writer who lived for quite some time with Sri Sai baba adds, "Subsequently, I marked that Shri Baba was, from time to time, also using the word 'Roshan'. He used it particularly when he told some parables. It seems Roshan Shah thereafter had cast off his mortal coil (his body) and Baba entombed him under or near the nimb (neem) tree at present found in Shirdi Navlkar's *wada* or mansion. When the previous owner of this *wada*, R. S. Sathe, wanted to put up a story and terrace, at the time of putting up a stair-case he unearthed a tomb with an under-ground cellar or a cave under the tree. Baba was asked as to what should be done about the tomb and the cave. Baba said that the place belonged to his elders and it should neither be disturbed nor opened but

it should be covered up with a stone as before". Some boys playing hide and seek removed the stone and found under it, several steps leading further down. They said that the cave was dark but rather long. Baba once told Shri Sai Sharananandji, pointing to a pillar near his *dhuni* (the sacred fire) in the mosque (*Dwaraka Mai*) that there was a cave thereunder to which he always confined himself, that once his beard grew so long that it reached the ground and swept it; that he never came out except to meet some holy or religious man. Throwing light on his life during this period, once Sai Baba admonished Sagunmeru Naik, "What? Can't you put up with a day or two days' starvation? I lived on margosa leaves for twelve long years!"

A devotee of Sai Baba, Hari Vinayak Sathe, reports, "Baba told me that the tomb close to that (neem) tree was that of his *guru*. He gave his name. It ended with 'Shah' or 'Sah'. Some of Sai Baba's devotees felt that they heard Baba say that his *guru* was Venkusa. While 'Roshan Shah' is a Moslem name, 'Venkusa' is a Hindu name. Whether this ambiguity lay in Baba's pronunciation or in his giving different answers to the same question when put by devotees of diverse temperaments, we cannot determine.

Our attempt at tracing the period of discipleship of Baba is already complicated. On the one hand we have his statement that when his mother rejoiced at his birth he himself wondered why she should be so elated, as he had always been in existence i.e., as the eternal spirit and he did not wrongly identify himself with his body. On the other side we have references to his discipleship. What is discipleship to one who was already perfect?

Again we cannot be very sure of the literal truth of the story of Baba's discipleship. For he once gave a different account of it altogether. It is worth quoting in its entirety:-

"Once four of us were studying religious scriptures and we began to discuss the ways of realizing *Brahman*. One of us said that we should elevate ourselves and not depend on others. To this the second replied that he who controls his mind is blessed, that we should be free from thoughts and ideas and there is nothing in the world without us. The third said that the world of phenomena is always changing, between the Real and the unreal. The fourth (i.e., Baba himself) urged that mere learning is worthless and added, 'Let us do our prescribed duty and surrender our body, mind and five *pranas* (or life impulses) to the *guru's* feet. Guru is "God, all-pervading. To get this conviction, strong and unbounded faith is necessary.

Discussing thus we four men began to ramble through the woods in quest of God. On the way a labourer met us and asked us where we were going in the heat of the day. We did not reveal the object of our quest to him. He then warned us of the danger of our losing the way in the woods if we went without a guide. Finally he said, 'You may not give out to me your secret quest; will you sit down, eat bread, drink water, take rest and then go!' But we rejected his offer and walked on. We lost our way. Ultimately, through sheer luck, we came back to the place from where we started.

The labourer met us again and said, "By relying on your own cleverness you missed your way; a guide is always necessary to show us the right way in all matters. No quest can be successfully carried out on an empty stomach. Unless God wills it, no one meets us on the way. Do not reject offers of food, (which are to be considered) auspicious signs of success!" He again offered us

food and asked us to be calm and patient.

I was hungry and thirsty and I was moved by the extraordinary love of the labourer who looked quite illiterate and of a 'low' caste. I thought that acceptance of his hospitality was the best beginning of gaining knowledge. So I respectfully accepted the food he had offered.

Then the *guru* stood before us and asked. 'What was the dispute about?' I told him everything that had happened. Then he said, 'Would you like to come with me? I will show you what you want, but only he who believes in what I say will be successful! I bowed to him reverently and accepted him as my guide. But the other three spurned his hospitality and his guidance and wandered away. They no longer searched for god but rambled idly in hunger and thirst.

Then he (the *guru*) took me to a well, tied my legs together with a rope and suspended me head downwards from a tree that stood close by. My head was three feet above the water, so that I could not reach it. Then he left me and returned again after about five hours and asked me how I was getting on. 'I am in bliss supreme', I replied. The *guru* was much pleased with my reply, embraced me, stroking my body with his hand. He accepted me as his disciple. I forgot my mother and father and all my desires. I loved to gaze on him endlessly. I did not want to go back. I forgot everything but the *guru*. My whole life was concentrated in my sight and my sight on him. He was the object of my meditation. In silence I bowed down." [6]

However, that Baba had a *guru* is certain; for he had a brick with him which he always used as a pillow when he slept, and on which he always kept his hand when he sat. He said of it, "This brick is my *guru's* gift, my life's companion." Probably the two accounts of his discipleship supplement each other.

Earlier biographers of Sai Baba have taken this episode, especially his being suspended head downwards, three feet above the water in a well, as being merely symbolic. Though their explanation of the symbolism is illuminating, the possibility of it being a literal fact cannot be ruled out. The earlier writers based their conjecture as to the symbolic nature of the episode on the common experience that 'no one can be at ease and feel bliss if he be suspended with a rope – head down and feet up – in a well for hours together!" [7] A similar incident took place in the life of Hazrat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, a contemporary of Sai Baba, which shows that the incident could literally have taken place. I shall quote at length from my unpublished book[8] on the great saint:

"The uncanny ways in which he transmitted various spiritual experiences are no less striking. One day someone asked Tajuddin Baba, 'Master, how can *'hal'* (bliss) be experienced?'. Baba took off his cap and kept it on the ground top downwards. The seeker was suddenly overwhelmed with the direct experience of *hal* and in that ecstatic state, stood on his head and started dancing on his head and hands! Only after Baba turned the cap into the normal position did the visitor get out of the ecstatic mood and he stood upright. Then Tajuddin Baba asked him,
'Have you realized how it is to be experienced?' The question has a deeper significance than is apparent. He, as a spiritual teacher, out of his grace, has to grant it to his disciple and that is the only way of experiencing *hal*. This incident also shows that mystical states of consciousness are not merely subjective states which the saint has to experience for himself through self-

conditioning or auto-suggestion, without any objective reality about them. He could, at will, communicate it to one who could not obtain the experience through his own endeavors. This finds a parallel in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa giving an experience of 'God' to Vivekananda at will".

This experience of *hal* by Tajuddin Baba's disciple and his experience of bliss in an inverted position shows that it is not only possible but conducive to certain types of spiritual ecstasy conferred upon disciples by their *gurus*.

Indeed the hanging of a *sadhaka* head downwards into a well seems to be a specific technique adopted by certain *gurus* to help their disciples achieve quick spiritual progress and some saints used the technique even for themselves. Baba Farid Ganj Sakkar, the *guru* of the celebrated saint of Delhi, Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia, hung himself head down into a well for forty days. But he administered no such method to his disciples. So it is a technique, which was called for by an individual need.

Once, during the early days of Baba's arrival at Shirdi, a magician from Belapur came to Shirdi. He was the son-in-law of one Moidinbhai. He had a quarrel with Sai Baba, and it is said, the two wrestled to settle the dispute and Baba was defeated. Then Baba left the village and lived in the jungle a mile or two away from Shirdi. He starved frequently, taking no food and allowed no one to approach him. If people went to him he would beat them.

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1 Anna Saheb Dhabolkar's "Sri Sai Satcharitra"
2 Name of Lord Siva's manifestation; Khandoba is the presiding deity of the village and a shrine to him is seen even today at the village
3 "Sai Satcharitra" (English) translated by Sri Gunaji
4 "Sai the Superman"
5 "Sai Satcharitra" and "Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings"
6 "Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings" by B.V.Narasimhaswamy
7 "The Incredible Sai Baba" by Arthur Osborne
8 Now published, in the year 1999 as Life and Teachings of Hazarath Tajuddin Baba.

A Sketch of His Life (II)

In the early days of his stay at Shirdi, Sai Baba grew his hair long but never had it shaved or cut. He dressed himself like an athlete. He used to tie a white turban on his head, a *dhotar* round his waist and wore a shirt. He was quiet and calm in his demeanour and showed no craving for any comforts or luxuries. He never discriminated between the rich and the poor in his treatment of the visitors. He was equally indifferent to honour or dishonour shown to him by the people. He used to utter the name of Allah frequently. He either spent his time alone at the mosque or wandered about the village or into the neighbouring jungles.

We have already noted how Tatya Kote, Mahalspathy and a few others respected Sai Baba as a saint. Tatya Kote's mother Bayajabai too was very much devoted to him. Whenever baba wandered into the jungles, Bayajabai used to go to the woods, carrying food in a basket on her head. She used to walk miles on end in search of him, across bushes and shrubs. She never gave up her search till she found him out. Often she found Sai Baba sitting alone, calm and motionless, under some tree, in deep meditation. Then she would boldly approach him, spread the leaf plate before him and serve the meal. Sometimes Sai Baba was oblivious of all this, immersed as he was in *dhyana samadhi*. At such moments she would mix the food and feed him with her own hands as a mother feeds the child. For sometime this was almost a regular occurrence and Bayajabai looked upon this as her vow and spiritual discipline. After sometime, as though out of compassion for her, Sai Baba ceased wandering and mostly confined himself to
the mosque. But he never forgot the devoted and loving services she had rendered to him as long as he was in flesh and blood. He not only treated her with great affection and love but showered his mercy on her son Tatya Kote also as though he were repaying a deep debt of gratitude.

We have noted earlier that he walked now and then to Rahata and Neemgaon. Once when he went to Rahata he had brought with him several varieties of seeds. After cleaning and levelling a certain plot of the village land, he planted the seeds and watered them regularly. A devotee by name Vamana Tatya supplied him every day with a pair of new, unbaked, earthen pots. Baba drew water from a nearby well and carried it in the pots on his shoulders and watered the plants. In the evening he would leave the pots at the foot of the neem tree and, strangely enough, as soon as he left them there they would crumble to pieces. The next day he would get a new pair of pots from Vamana Tatya. This went on regularly for quite some time and in due course a beautiful garden grew up. Visualizing the whole process, it seemed symbolic of the elevation of a god- forsaken village like Shirdi into a powerful spiritual center and of the common rung of the society that came to him into a luscious spiritual crop. In fact, at a later date, (as we are to not later) this was the symbol he used when he told Upasani Sastry, whom he alchemised into the great saint Sri Upassani Baba Majharaj of Sakori, "You must plant trees that will live for many centuries, from which people will derive much benefit."

The whole act of growing the garden, too, seemed to signify what is to come ultimately. For it was on that plot of land that subsequently his *samadhi mandir* was to stand! Is not that an eternal flower garden of the spirit?

In the early days of Sai Baba's second advent at Shirdi, the majority of the villagers took him for a mad *fakir*. For, while he mingled with no one, he was often found muttering something to himself. Occasionally he would even burst into a rage and go on heaping abuse as though he was subject to some hallucination. However, in his 'saner' moments he was normal. He used to meet some of the noble souls and saintly persons that sojourned at the village. It was only the testimony of some of the acknowledged saints regarding his spiritual greatness that induced a few more natives of the village to respect him.

For instance, twelve years before Baba arrived at Shirdi, a young boy of ten or eleven years, named Devidas, came to the village and lived in the Maruthi temple. Devidas had fine features and bright eyes. He was a *jnani*, dispassion incarnate. Many natives like Tatya Kote, Kashinath and others regarded him as their *guru*.

When Baba arrived at Shirdi and began to live in the mosque, he often used to join Devidas and stay with him in the Maruthi temple or in the village *chavadi*. As we shall note a little later, this Devidas was responsible for Baba's permanent stay at Shirdi.

Later, another saint by name Janakidas came to Shirdi and Baba spent much of his time with him. Sometimes Janakidas went to the mosque and stayed in Baba's company.

Similarly a *vaisya* (i.e., one of the merchant caste) householder saint by name Gangagir came frequently to Shirdi from Puntamba. When he first saw Sai Baba carrying water from the well, he said, "Blessed is this village of Shirdi; this dung hill got a precious jewel. This man is carrying water today, but he is not an ordinary fellow. This land is really fortunate".

Another famous saint by name Anandaswami of Yewala Muth, a disciple of the celebrated saint Sri Akkalkot Maharaj, came to Shirdi in 1885. On seeing Baba he said, "Though he looks like an ordinary stone (i.e., an ordinary man) he is a diamond. You will soon realize this".

One interesting aspect of Baba's personality, besides his earlier fondness for wrestling, was his love of songs and dance. In the early years of his life at Shirdi he used to go to the *takia*, the public resting place for Moslem visitors to the village, at night. There, in the company of sojourning devotees and *fakirs*, he would dance and sing melodiously, with small trinkets tied around his ankles. The songs he sang were mostly in Persian or Arabic, which the local people could not understand. Sometimes he sang the more popular songs of Kabir. This went on till as late as 1890. Subsequently he stopped singing himself but his love of devotional music could be recognized. He encouraged his devotees to sing *kavvalis* and *kirtans* and to chant the attributes of god incessantly for seven days on end.

In spite of the testimony of many saints regarding Baba's greatness, many were still ridden with the doubt that he was a little cracked in the head. One miracle that they witnessed had ultimately set their doubts at rest.

Baba was fond of illuminating the local temples and the mosque with oil-lamps at night. He used to beg oil from the grocers everyday and after sunset, he used to light the earthen lamps and keep them burning throughout the night. At one stage, the grocers felt that they were wasting what little oil they were giving him. So one day all of them agreed among themselves and said 'No' to him and they curiously watched what he would do next.

Baba calmly returned to the mosque, drew water from the well, rinsed the oil-can well with a little of it, and gulped it down at one drought. Again he filled the can with the water and, returning to the mosque, poured it in the lamps and lighted them. To the utter amazement of the prying scoffers, the lamps went on burning throughout the night. The grocers begged his pardon. Baba exhorted them never to utter lies but to be truthful and to have faith in god. The darkness of their ignorance was, as it were, driven out by the lamps of faith that he lit in their hearts, pouring

the water of his grace into them, and the external act was a living symbol of what he was subtly doing with their spirits.

News of this miracle flashed across the village and the neighborhood like a lightning and his fame thundered, as it were, heralding a downpour of his grace on devotees. It was the herald of a new chapter in the annals of the village and also in the lives of the countless devotees that were to bask in his grace and protection. The streets of Shirdi were to overflow with streams of devotees from all parts of the country.

Mosque or Dwarakamai?

It would be of interest to see how the mosque looked, after Baba came to reside there. R.A. Tarkhad of Bandra actually saw Baba living in the mosque. He describes it in detail:

"The place where he used to sit looked to all outward appearances as tumbled-down old ramshackle sort of construction. But in that small oblong room Sai Baba sat in the North East corner. Opposite to him, in the opposite corner, was the sacred fire burning night and day. Next to this sacred *dhuni* (fire) were earthen pots filled with water for Baba to drink and perform ablutions. The wall had a niche in which were placed a number of earthen *chilims* (i.e., clay pipes for smoking). Next to Baba's place and on the right side were a couple of grinding stones where he occasionally used to grind corn and pulses.

There was a sack of wheat and a sack of country tobacco. This tobacco was put in the earthen pipes and smoked, the pipe being offered to various devotees, smoked by them and passed on to and fro to Baba.

On the western wall was a sort of niche as is observed in Mohammedan *musjids* (mosques).

Opposite to this niche, in the central part of the room, Sri Sai Baba partook of a little of the food which he daily begged from some houses in the village and of the offerings made by visitors and others. These he mixed and personally distributed to some of the devotees, amongst whom were high cast Hindus, Brahmins, Moslems and Parsees.

When a Moslem visitor came up to pay his respects with flowers, lump sugar and coconuts, *Fatia* (Moslem prayers) was uttered in which Baba joined. The flowers were hung up in the central niche mentioned above, the lump sugar was partly distributed amongst all those present there as well as the village urchins outside and a part of it returned to the party as *prasad* (consecrated gift). The coconuts were broken up and similarly distributed. All the while, the Hindu devotees sitting there witnessed this *Fatia* and partook of the lump of sugar as well as pieces of coconuts with pleasure and joy.

The Hindus worshipped Sri Sai Baba with all their rituals as observed in the Hindu temples. Sandal paste was applied to Baba's forehead, chest, hands and feet. *Kumkum*, with rice was similarly applied. The toes of his feet were washed and the water was partaken as sacred *teertha* (holy water). The *arthi* was performed at noon with all the din and paraphernalia of worship as in

a Hindu temple. Bells were rung. Sacred lamp with its five lights was waved before him, cymbals clashed, the big drum sounded, the huge bell in the compound sent its notes for miles and miles around and hundreds of devotees recited in perfect union the words of the *arti* and the sacred Sanskrit hymns. The Moslems present there enjoyed all this and freely partook of the offerings distributed by the Hindu *bhaktas* (devotees).

This wonderful place was called *Dwarakamai* by Sri Sai Baba and he was heard many a time saying that whoever stepped into this *Dwarakamai* had his future assured.

It would thus be seen that this wonderful place, owing to the presence of the sacred fire, was a temple to the most orthodox Hindu and Parsee; and owing to the niche, it was a *musjid* (mosque) to the Moslem; and to the Christian it was a church where the bells announce prayers. So in this unique place all the principal creeds were united and the common worship of the universal god brought home to each and all in a unique and living manner. Moreover, to the ordinary householder, an object lesson for carrying on his daily earthly duties with tolerance for the views and rituals of others, was driven home in the most vivid and unmistakable manner.

The title *Dwarakamai* which Baba gave to the mosque signifies this truth for which Baba stands. For, the Skanda Purana explains this title as meaning, "the place where doors are open to all people of the four castes for accomplishing the four *purusharthas* (objects of man's life) viz., *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (the means of living), *kama* (fulfilments of legitimate desires) and *moksha* (release from ignorance or imperfection)".

In course of time Sai Baba came to have one more resting place, the *chavadi*. Originally it was a structure intended to be the venue of gathering of the village elders to discuss matters of public concern. Once during very heavy rains, the whole mosque was wet and there was not a single dry spot left where he and his devotees could sit in comfort. In those days it did not have the frontyard covered as it is today nor was the floor. It was a mud mosque and its floor was smeared periodically with cowdung. On that day one Narayana Teli proposed to Baba that they should all go to the *chavadi* which is protected from the rain. Then baba, in his characteristic manner, refused to go there himself and told the devotees to go there. His devotees insisted and finally,

taking liberties with the indulgence he showed them, held him by his arms and brought him to the *chavadi*. Once he slept in that place he made it a rule to spend alternate nights in the *chavadi*. His movements from and to the *chavadi*, were all accompanied by a procession of his devotees in all ceremony, pomp and music.

Madhav Rao Deshpande who was to be very dearly loved and addressed by Sai Baba a little late as 'Shama' records his observations of the great saint during the early years of his stay at the *musjid*:

"I was an assistant teacher in a school….A window of that always looked on the adjoining mosque. Through that I occasionally watched Sai Baba who was taken by people to be a mad *fakir*. I had no regard for him then…I used to sleep in the school. Baba was the sole occupant of the mosque. Yet I could hear English, Hindi and many languages being spoken in the mosque (at night) evidently by Baba. I inferred that he had remarkable powers and began to have faith in him".

There arose a problem due to the spread of Sai's fame. One Mohiddin Tambuli having a good physique with strong muscles, was selling betels and talismans in Shirdi. The natives of the village honoured him thinking that he had some divine powers. When the greatness of Sai was unfolding, unable to bear it, one day he quarreled that either he or Sai should be in Shirdi and said that the same should be decided by a wrestling contest between them. He fought with Sai and won the fight. From that day onwards according to that condition, Sai stayed in the garden at the bank of Lindi Lake. Devotees like Tatya took his darshan there itself. Sai did not come to the Village in spite of their repeated requests. One day suddenly there was some transformation in Tambuli and having decided to live near the tomb of a *mahatma*, he left Shirdi. His physical strength was conquered by Baba's spiritual strength and his hatred by Baba's love. Then Baba returned to the *musjid*.

Henceforth Baba changed his dress and mode of living. He donned a *kafni* or a long shirt, and used a piece of sack cloth for his seat and bed and was content to be dressed in rags. He always declared that *fakiri* (holy poverty) was far superior to wealth. For Allah is always the friend of the poor. Baba answered only when he was addressed. By day he always stayed in the mosque or under the neem tree or under a babul tree outside the village. In the afternoons he used to wander towards Neemgaon or Rahata. At Neemgaon he used to visit one Triambakji Dengale. Baba once blessed his brother with a son and henceforth people started coming to him in small numbers for his blessings. He wore no shoes or sandals. The cloth tied around his head and twisted into a flowing plaint dangling behind his left ear was not washed for weeks. He always kept a fire burning before him in the mosque and this is the famed *dhuni* which is still kept burning by the Sai Samsthan.

Another incident happened after five years. A Moslem named Jawahar Ali came from Ahmedangar to Rahata. He was a great scholar endowed with a sweet tongue. Soon he brought the natives of that village under his sway and started to build for the sake of Moslems, a place for praying. But, in the meanwhile the people, unable to bear with his narrow minded religious view, drove him away from that village. Ali ran away and took shelter in the *musjid* at Shirdi. But he did not leave his narrow mentality. He influenced the devotees by his good talk and soon started

telling that Sai was his disciple. Baba also started behaving accordingly with patience and humility. Ali thought of making use of this opportunity and taking Baba he went to Rahata and started to live there. Both of them used to come now and then to Shirdi and go back. Unable to bear this situation, devotees went to Rahata to bring Baba to Shirdi. There Baba met them near the Idga (the wall before which the Moslems pray on their holy day of Id) and said, "This Ali will not send me at all. I should not come if he does not send me. He is an irritable man. Even if he sees you, he will become wild. It will be good if you return before he comes". By that time he came and on hearing about their idea, flew into a rage. At last they arrived at an agreement and brought both the *guru* and the disciple to Shirdi. Soon, the devotees who disliked the behavior of Ali, arranged a discussion in *vedanta* (Hindu philosophy) between him and Devidas. In that, the old scholar Ali had a defeat in front of the young Devidas. On the next day he left for Bijapur without telling anybody. Later on, once he repented for his behavior and took *darshan* of Baba with *bhakthi* and *sraddha*. Baba had been showing by his behavior how much humility and patience a *sadhu* should have. As Ramana Maharshi has said, "Only a *jnani* can recognize a *jnani*". But it took that long for Ali to realize that. The truth blended with love and patience only conquered in the end.

One Shankar Narayana Vaidya used to worship the *samadhi* of a *mahatma* called Nanavalli. One day that *mahatma* gave him *darshan* in a dream and ordered him to go to Shirdi. He went to Shirdi. When Sai came, as soon as he saw him, he recognized him to be a great soul and with great intimacy he said "*Mama*, have you come?" As Baba told him not to open his mouth, he did not tell anybody anything about Baba. Devotees started calling him Nanavalli. Once he approached Baba who was seated on his *gaddi* (raised seat) and asked him in a rude manner, to get up, as he himself wanted to sit there. Baba at once got up very willingly and Nanavalli sat in that place. After a few seconds Nanavalli got up and asked Baba to resume his place and when he sat there, fell at his feet and went away. Evidently Nanavalli wanted to test whether Baba's growing fame had made him possessive and proud. Finding him not in the least displeased at being so rudely ordered out of his seat, Nanavalli bowed before Baba, meekness personified. When Baba attained *samadhi*, he had been lamenting, "Oh, Mama, I cannot live without you. I will also come!" for thirteen days; and without taking even food and water, he also took *samadhi*.

Devidas was practicing medicine in the surrounding villages. One day Baba reproached him saying "*Sadhus* should be at a long distance from ladies". Nobody knew the reason for that reproach. After some days a rich woman brought him under her sway by threatening to spread bad rumour about him. Then he understood the meaning of Sai's words and went away leaving that place. But Janakidas used to follow the warnings of Sai scrupulously. At last when he was leaving Shirdi, devotees gave him a grand send-off. At that time his divine brilliance merged in the idol of Maruthi, in the form of a light.

The Call of The Guru

It is said in most of the Indian scriptures that in order to attain the final realization, it is necessary to resort to a *guru*. The Sufis too attach great reverence to the *'Murshid'* (*guru*), And I believe the same ideas underlines Jesus Christ's words, "No one can come to the Father except through me". This is a truth which represents a particular angle of vision. Those who are not ripe enough to understand the truth implied herein have a doubt as to how one could be sure whether a particular holy man is a worthy guide or not. The one unfailing solution to the problem was given by great ones like Kabir who says that we need not run in search of the *guru*, that he would come to us if and when we are ready to receive him. Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi also often told his devotees that though God, *Guru* and the Self are one, when a seeker needs a *guru* in the human form, the Lord does appear to him in that form to turn his mind inward.

There are very many instances in which Sri Baba played the role of the *guru* in human form and led the seeker to himself. Sometimes, the seeker was led to him by Baba himself in his own person and sometimes by a deity which the seeker worshipped devoutly. Sometimes another great saint had led the devotees to him. However, it is not to be supposed that every one that is led to the *sadguru* is bound to become perfect in this life itself. Every one derives benefit according to the ripeness of his soul and in accordance with his inner yearning. Many of them take lives of inner development and in each, the *sadguru* lifts him on to a higher level. In some, this development may not manifest to themselves. We shall now proceed to note how several of his devotees were drawn to Sri Sai Baba.

M.G. Pradhan, a clerk of Bombay had lost his seven year-old son and was much upset. He heard of Sai Baba from one of his friends, One night he had a dream in which he saw five *sadhus* seated together. He asked them, "Which of you is Sai Baba?" One of them pointed to Sai Baba who was seated among the other four *sadhus*. Later, when he visited Shirdi, he was surprised to see that Sai Baba looked exactly as he did in his dream. He even revealed that, he knew Pradhan quite well by describing his house in Bombay, his garden and the number of Ramaphal and Sitaphal trees in it very accurately. He then said to some of the devotees present at the *musjid* about Pradhan, "Why does the fool go on lamenting the death of a son? It is merely going to the earth. Why go on lamenting that?"

Mrs. And Mr. Pradhan were henceforth devoted to Sai Baba but a learned Pandit Madhav Bhat who was attached to their family, and who did *puja* and *mantra japa* for their benefit was at heart unhappy that the Hindu couple should worship Sai Baba who, he thought, was a Moslem. When Babu, their son, was once seriously ill, he attributed it to the wrath of the Hindu gods for their error. Later one night he had a dream in which he saw Sai Baba seated on the top of the stair case, holding his short staff (*satka*). Baba said, "What do you mean? I am the lord of this house!" Madhav Bhat kept the dream to himself. Later, when Babu's condition worsened in spite of Bhat's *japa*, the latter ran to Baba's photograph and loudly prayed, "If the child should improve sufficiently by 4 p.m. today as to be brought downstairs, then I will agree that you are Lord Dattatreya. Soon after, the fever subsided and by 4 p.m. the boy wanted to be taken downstairs for a change. Madhav Bhat was convinced that Sai Baba was Lord Dattatreya himself and was henceforth devoted to him.

D.M. Mulgy of Gadag was an atheist and did not believe in Baba nor did he care to see his picture which his brother worshipped. In 1916, he fell seriously ill. One night, an old man wearing a long white kafni and a white cloth tied round his head appeared in his dream and told him that his fever would pass off soon if he promised to go for his (the old man's) *darshan*. Mulgy promised to do so and the old man disappeared. The dream so frightened him that he cried out. His sister-in-law ran to his bedside, woke him up and, on hearing of his dream, showed him the picture of Baba. Mulgy was convinced that Sai Baba himself had appeared in his dream. The fever subsided and he was all right in a short time. Later, when he visited Shirdi, he was struck by Baba's exact likeness to the old man that had appeared in his dream.

M.B. Rege was very devoted to Lord Vishnu from his boyhood. Even from his younger days, he used to sit for long in one yogic posture, meditating on his chosen deity. In his twenty-first year (about 1910), he had three successive dream-visions in one night. At first, he experienced his separation from his physical body and before him was the divine form of Lord Vishnu. A second time the same vision recurred but this time there was someone else standing beside Him: Lord Vishnu pointed to that stranger and said, "This Sai Baba of Shirdi is your man; you must resort to him." In the third vision he again left his physical body and drifted in the air to some village. There a stranger told him that it was Shirdi. Then he enquired whether there was a holy man by name Sai Baba in that village. The stranger led him to a mosque where Rege saw Sai Baba seated leaning against its wall with his legs stretched before him. On seeing Rege, Sai Baba got up and said, "Do you take my *darshan*? I am your debtor, I must take your *darshan*! And placed his head reverently on Rege's feet. Then the vision ended. Though he saw Sai Baba's picture earlier, he never knew that Sai Baba's most characteristic manner of sitting was with his legs stretched out before him. Shortly after, Rege went to Shirdi to verify whether Baba was his destined *guru* as the dream seemed to indicate. When he actually saw Baba a doubt arose in his mind whether it would be proper to worship a man like him. At once Baba said, "What, do you worship a man?" The rebuff was keen and to the point. When every other devotee retired to his room, Rege made bold to visit Sai, though it was thought that no one should visit him at that hour, Baba, far from getting angry, beckoned to him. Rege approached him and bowed in reverence. At once Sai Baba hugged him with love and said, "You are my child. When others (i.e., strangers) are present, we (i.e., saints like me) keep off the children". Thus was the man's dream confirmed.

On another afternoon Baba embraced him and said, "The key of my treasury is now placed in your hands. Ask anything you want." "Then Baba", said shrewd Rege, "I want this: In this and in any future birth that may befall me, you should never part from me. You should always be with me." Baba patted him joyously and said, "Yes, I shall be with you, inside you and outside you, whatever you may be or do".

There is one instance to show how, when Rege's heart was yielding to some other love, Baba asserted his monopoly over it. Many years later, Rege's child died and his wife was disconsolate. With the dead child in his lap, Rege sat on with a grief-stricken heart. Baba at once appeared before him and said, "Do you want me or the dead child? Choose! You cannot have both. If you want me to revive the child, I will; but then you will have me no more with you. If you do not ask for the revival of this one, you will have several children in due course." Then Rege said that

he wanted Him only. “Then do not grieve”, Baba said and vanished.

Another confirmation that he was Baba’s man: Once he visited a great saint in Poona, named Sri Madhavanath. The latter said, “You are Sai Baba’s man”.

In 1912, Rege visited Baba on the holy *Guru Purnima* day. Seeing other devotees offering garlands and other gifts to Baba he regretted that he did not remember to get any gift. At once Baba said, “All these are yours!”, and pointed at the garlands offered by other devotees. Thereby Baba hinted that the heart’s loving wish to offer is of greater value than a formal physical offering.

Toser was an employee in the customs department. In 1985 he had a dream in which he saw a holy man, and considered him as his *guru*. In 1910 he learned about Sai Baba and his greatness from Das ganu’s *kirtans* and immediately proceeded to Shirdi. He was thrilled to find that Sai Baba was the *guru* that appeared to him in 1895. After Baba’s *mahasamadhi*, Toser became a disciple of the great saint Sri Vasudevananda Saraswathi (alias Tembe Swamy). Later, he took *sannyas* and was known by the name Sri Narayan Ashram.

Balabhate was a free-thinking merry-go-lucky type of man. He was a *mamlatdar* at Kopergaon for five years, from 1904 to 1909. He used to say that Baba was just a mad *fakir* and scoffed at those who visited Shirdi often. Once some of his friends suggested that he should rather go and see Baba before forming his opinion of him. So he accompanied them to Shirdi and stayed there for five days. On the fifth day Sai Baba covered him with a *gerua* or *kashaya* (ochre) robe. From that day Bhate was a changed man. He did not care for earnings or work, and his only wish was to be at Shirdi and serve Baba till the last moment of his life. Sai Baba made Dixit write an application for leave for one year and, persuaded Bhate to sign it. The District Collector granted him leave for one year. But at the end of the year he still continued to be ‘mad after his *guru*’. He was granted a compassionate pension of about Rs. 30/- p.m. as one afflicted with ‘religious melancholia’. When his friends asked him the reason for his transformation he told them that the change came in him suddenly when Baba put the *gerua* on him. “By that”, he said “my original frame of mind was removed and, in its place, quite a new frame of mind was put in. After that, attending to worldly duties – especially official duties – became unthinkable”. He then lived at Shirdi, attending to his daily austerities, like Upanishad-reading in the presence of Sai Baba and so on. Occasionally Sai Baba offered useful comments on that reading. Bhate’s wife and family came to Shirdi and lived with him.

The transformation of Bhate reminds us of the effect of Sri Ramakrishna’s touch on Sri Vivekananda, the effect of the death-experience on Sri Ramana in his sixteenth year and the effect of the *guru*’s touch on the boy Tajhuddin who later became famous as Hazarat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur. Such perfect *bhakti* and his incapacity to attend to the merely bread-winning official duties shows that he experienced certain higher form of *samadhi* and that some of his higher *charkas*, to put it in *yogic* terminology, must have been awakened. It is obvious that here, in Bhate, is one of those very few that deserved something which Baba yearned to bestow on his devotees.

Balakrishna Govinda Upasani was a professor of Sanskrit in Poona and was the brother of Sri Upasani Baba. Once his college was closed owing to the out-break of plague and he went on a pilgrimage to Hardwar and Tapovan along with his mother. There he met a *sadhu* who stared at him and asked him if he was from Satana in Maharashtra. When that was confirmed, the *sadhu* told him to visit him again the next day in the afternoon. His Mother too accompanied him the next day but a search for fifteen minutes for the *sadhu* did not prove fruitful. As soon as Balakrishna's mother went home disappointed the *sadhu* at once appeared before him and said, "Do not act in this manner again…Only those who are asked to come should come!" Then the *sadhu* said that he had given a *saligram* (a sacred tone) to one Uddhav Maharaj whose grandson gave it to the grand-father of Balakrishna and that it was being worshipped by Balakrishna himself. (From this we can understand how old the *sadhu* must have been!) Then switching over from Marathi to Hindustani, the *sadhu* said, "Lo, there was a tree. Two persons went up that tree. One came down; the other went up….You will come to know!" The *sadhu* looked about sixty years old, a bit stout and had nothing but a *koupina* (a codpiece).

Later, in 1910 Balakrishna's brother developed some respiratory trouble during the practice of *yoga* and left his home. So Balakrishna started in search of him. When the train stopped at Koperagaon a friend named Bhat met him on the railway platform and told him that a great saint, Sai Baba, lived only a few miles away and persuaded him to break his journey. He even sent Balakrishna to Shirdi by a *tonga* (or horse-coach). On seeing him Baba said, "Go to Khandoba!" Balakrishna thought that Baba wanted him to see the idol in that shrine and said that Baba was all the gods and therefore there was no more need for him to go to that temple. But Baba repeated his order. So the visitor thought that Baba wanted him to go out. When he did, some one told him that one Upasani Sastry stayed at the Khandoba's temple. Balakrishna at once went there and found his brother who was staying there on Baba's orders!

Afterwards, when Balakrishna returned to the mosque, Baba stared at him and said in Hindusthani, "Lo, there was a tree. Two persons went up the tree. One came down. The other went up!" Balakrishna was amazed on hearing Baba utter precisely the same words as were used by the *sadhu* at Tapovan years earlier. Then he noted that Baba did resemble the Tapovan *sadhu* though their dress was different. The master met his devotee far ahead of the devotee seeing him and gave him a clue to identify him when he, the devotee, meets him again at Shirdi.

Shevade was confident of passing the law examination in spite of his inadequate study as he had the blessing of Sai Baba. His friend Sapatnekar laughed at his superistitious sentiments. In due course Sapatnekar himself settled at Akkalkot as a lawyer. Ten years after, in 1913, he lost his only son and was much depressed. Piligrimages to Pandharpur and Gangapur did not give him any solace. One day he remembered Shevade's reference to Sai Baba and went to Shirdi along with his brother Panditrao and was much pleased on seeing Baba. When he placed a coconut before Baba and bowed to him, Baba brusquely said, "Get Out!" Sapatnekar was mortified and sat at a distance. Later he sought a fellow-devotee's help to pacify Baba and gain access to him. The devotee Bala Shimpi, in one of Baba's lighter moods, took a picture of Baba with him and, showing it to Baba, asked him whose portrait it was. Baba pointed to Sapatnekar and said that the picture was that of his (i.e., Sapatnekar's) lover, and laughed supportively and all the devotees shared the joke. Bala Shimpe beckoned to Sapatnekar to approach Baba. When Sapatnekar bowed before Baba, the latter again brusquely said, "Get Out!". Both the visitor and

Bala Shimpe were disappointed.

One year passed during which a few more pilgrimages did nothing to console the Sapatnekars. Finally, they decided to visit Banaras. The night before they started, Mrs. Sapatnekar had a dream: she was going to a well with a pitcher to fetch driniking water. She saw a *fakir*, with a cloth tied around his head, seated under a neem tree. The *fakir* approached her and said, "My child, I shall fetch water for you". She was frightened and moved away and the *fakir* followed her. At that juncture she woke up and narrated her dream to her husband. They took this to be an invitation from Baba and they went to Shirdi. Mrs. Sapatnkar saw Sai Baba who was returning to the mosque from lendi and was surprised to see that he was the *fakir* that appeared in her dream. When Baba took his seat in the mosque she bowed to him. Baba said, in his characteristic, veiled, manner, "My arms, abdomen and waist have been paining for a long time. I tried many medicines in vain. But to my utter surprise all the pains have just now disappeared mysteriously." Indeed it was Mrs. Sapatnekar's story: she was just at that moment cured of all the obstinate pains from which she had been suffering for a long time. She was amazed at Baba's ominiscience and such powers as would cure ailments with a word!

Hoping that Baba was in a jolly mood, Sapatnekar went and bowed to Baba. Baba shouted, "Get out!" This time Sapatnekar understood that he was angry at his past misdeeds and decided to win his grace. He saw Baba when he was alone and touched his feet with his head. Baba did not shout but put his loving hand on the visitor's head. Then a shepherdess came and sat massaging Sai Baba's waist. Baba narrated a story in his characteristic vein, of a *bania* (a merchant), the trials and tribulations of his life. It was indeed a veiled account of Sapatnekar's life. Then Baba said to the shepherdess, pointing at Sapatnekar, "This fellow says that I (i.e., God) has killed his child. Do I kill anyone's children? Why does this fellow cry even after stepping into this *musjid?* Now I will again place that very child in his wife's womb" and he blessed Sapatnekar. Sapatnekar gratefully bowed and touched Baba's feet and Baba assured him, "These feet are ageless and holy. Place your entire faith in me and you will achieve your object."

The Sapatnekars stayed at Shirdi for a few days. Every day they used to offer *naivedya* (offering of food) to Baba and then took it as his *prasad* (consecrated gift). One day, seeing Sapatnekar pushing in the crowd to bow to him, Sai Baba said, "Why do you prostrate yourself again and again? The one salutation you have already made with love and humility is enough."

The next day Sapatnekar wanted to take leave of Baba to return to Akkalkot. While starting for the *Dwarakamai* he wanted to give Re. 1/- to Baba as *dakshina* and kept one rupee more in reserve to offer if Baba asked a second time. He set apart the money for his return fares. When he went to *Dwarakamai*, Baba received the one rupee that Sapatnekar gave and asked for one more as per his intention. Receiving them Baba blessed him saying, "Take this coconut and give it to your wife. Go home happily". Within a year Sapatnekar had a son and he visited Baba again with his wife and child.

Sai Baba used to say, "I draw my man to me, wherever and however far he might be, like a sparrow with a string tied to its legs". How graphic is the description and how literally true it is in the case of Kakasaheb Dixit! Kakasaheb, a famous lawyer of Bombay, once met his old friend Nanasaheb Chandorkar and told him how his leg-bone was fractured when he fell while boarding

train in London. Nanasaheb promptly advised him to visit Sai Baba.

Shortly after, Kakasaheb had to go to Ahmednagar. After his work was done, he wished to visit Shirdi. When his hosts were still thinking of a proper person to take him to Shirdi, Baba was making all arrangements to draw his devotee to him in his mysterious manner. Sharma had to go to Ahmednagar along with his wife to see his mother-in-law who was seriously ill. Kakasaheb's host met him there and requested him to take their guest to Shirdi. Shama's mother-in-law soon recovered. Just when they were about to start, his host unveiled the portrait of Baba which was in their house. It belonged to Megha and as the glass was broken it was sent to Ahmednagar for reframing. It was reframed and it, or rather Sai himself, along with his principal devotee, were to take Kaka to Shirdi.

The train arrived in time but the second class bogie was over-crowded. When the party was a little worried about securing accommodation, the railway guard met them and he was an old acquaintance of Kakasaheb. He promptly put them in the first class carriage and Kaka had a comfortable journey. On seeing Sai Baba, Kakasaheb found that all his expectations had been more than fulfilled. On seeing Kaka, Sai Baba said that he was awaiting his arrival !

If some of the readers are disposed to treat the whole episode as a mere coincidence, there is another incident to show that it was indeed a part of Baba's *leela*.

Kakaji Vaidya, the priest in the temple of goddess Saptasringi at Vani, had a series of calamities in life. He had lost all peace of mind and sought the protection of the goddess. One night she appeared in his dream and said, "Go to Baba and then you will gain peace". In those days Sai Baba was not yet so well known. So Kakaji wanted to know from her who he was. But before he did, she had disappeared. He thought that she directed him to Lord Siva at Tryambakeswar. So he went there and worshipped that deity for ten days but to no purpose. In despair he returned and again prayed fervently for clearer guidance. That night the goddess appeared in his dream and said, "Why did you go to Tryambakeswar? By 'Baba' I mean Sri Sai Samarth of Shirdi."

Kakaji did not know where Shirdi was and how to go there and none could guide him. Baba's omniscient gaze noticed the "sparrow's" longing and his invisible hand promptly arranged the situation needed.

A great astrologer who arrived at Shirdi told Shama that the vows of his mother to goddess Saptasringi were not fulfilled and that the family troubles were all a sequel of that breach of promise. Shama was reminded of what his dying mother told him thirty years earlier: When, in his childhood, Shama was seriously ill, she vowed to goddess Saptasringi at Vani that if he recovered, she would take the child for her darshan. The child recovered, but she could not fulfill her vow. After sometime, she suffered from ring-worms on her breasts which defied all medical treatment. Then she again vowed to the same goddess that if she was cured of her ailment, she would offer a pair of silver breasts. She was cured and again she failed to fulfill her vows. On her deathbed, she took a promise from Shama that he would fulfill her vows. The son also neglected his promise for nearly thirty years. Shama also heard that once a person has surrendered to a *guru* like Sai Baba, he must henceforth see all gods in the *guru* . So he promptly got pair of silver breasts made by a goldsmith, prostrated before Baba and begged him to accept the gifts and

relieve him and his mother of their vows to goddess Saptasringi.

Baba was very particular in such matters. At the time when Shama's mother made the vows, Baba was not at Shirdi and she meant her vows only for the particular deity. Now neither Shama nor he can properly modify the same. So he insisted on Shama going to Vani and fulfilling the two vows. Baba alone knew that this visit had another purpose to serve in his mysterious scheme.

Shama promptly arrived at Kakaji's house. After knowing his purpose Kakaji was thrilled with joy when he learned that there came to him, uninvited and unsought, a man from Sai Baba, precisely at a moment when he himself was dying to know where Shirdi was. Shama's purpose fulfilled, he took Kakaji with him to Sai Baba. On seeing Baba, he prostrated before Baba and was speechless with joy. He wondered to see that the goddess's words were literally true: he had to say nothing to Baba about his sufferings. The very sight of Baba made his mind calm and peaceful. After twelve days he returned to Vani. But his heart was ever after in the possession of Baba. Here too, Sai Baba sent his principal devotee to fetch the other sheep of his vast flock.

Ramlal, a Brahmin of Bombay once saw in his dream an odd-looking saint. The spiritual magnetism of the holy one was so striking. He at once decided to take darshan of the saint but he knew little about the saint or his whereabouts. Yet the next afternoon, when he was strolling along a street, an exact portrait of the saint was placed prominently in a shop. He enquired and was told that he was Sai Baba of Shirdi. He at once visited Shirdi and took Baba's darshan and stayed on there till his death.

Balakram Mankar, a devotee of Baba was dejected when he lost his dear wife. Entrusting the family to his son, he came and lived at Shirdi. One day Baba gave him Rs. 12/- and told him to go and stay at holy Macchindragad in Satara district and told him that it would help him much spiritually. Baba sent Mankar with the instruction that he should practise meditation thrice daily and assured him of his (Baba's) presence with him there.

At Macchindragad, Mankar, with great faith put Baba's instruction into practice. After some days one day when mankar was quite awake, Sai Baba appeared before him physically. Mankar bowed to him at once and even touched his feet. Then he asked Baba why he was sent to Macchindragad. Baba replied, "When you were at Shirdi your mind was getting disturbed by thoughts. You were developing the erroneous view that I am identical with my physical body which is confined to Shirdi. Now, see whether this form of mine is in any way less real than my form at Shirdi. It is to demonstrate the truth about me that I have sent you here." Later Mankar went to Pune.

One day Mankar wished to go to Dadar. The crowds were too big at the railway counter and there seemed little hope of his getting a ticket in time. Suddenly a villager clothed only in his loin-cloth and rapped in a coarse wool garment approached him and enquiring of Mankar's destination, handed him a ticket to Dadar and said that as he himself droped his intended journey to Dadar, he was willing to give the ticket to him (i.e., to Mankar). Before Mankar could pay for it, the man disappeared in the crowd and could not be found any where! From Dadar, Mankar went to Shirdi and lived there till the end of his life.

All devotees are not cast in the same mould. Yet, a *guru,* like a mother, responds with equal love to their different demands. Some of Baba's devotees were demanding in their attitude. Usually it is a Master that says to the devotee, "If you take one step towards me, I shall take two towards you." But with Baba, at least in some faces, it seemed the other way round. Some people were prepared to believe in him only if their conditions were satisfied.

When Tatyasaheb Noolkar was a sub-judge at Pandharpur, Nanasaheb Chandorkar told him about Baba's greatness and advised him to visit Shirdi. Noolkar at once put two tests to Baba's grace. He said he would go to Shirdi only if he could secure a Brahmin cook and a good variety of Nagpur oranges as offering to Baba. Shortly after, a Brahmin approached Nanasaheb Chandorkar seeking employment. He promptly directed the Brahmin to Noolkar who realized that his first condition was fulfilled. Shortly, Noolkar also received a hundred oranges from Nagpur as a gift by parcel, the sender being, mysteriously, unknown. Nothing then held him back from rushing to Baba. He lived in Baba's presence and passed away too. During last moments of his life sacred scriptures were read out to him and holy water in which Baba's feet were washed was given to him for drinking. On hearing about his death, Baba said, "Oh, Tatya went ahead of us! He won't be reborn."

All the devotees that were drawn to Baba do not derive the same benefit. Nor would a God-man violate all laws of natural justice of God to benefit anyone beyond his capacity to be benefited. But no one will be allowed to fall to a lower level and the maximum possible benefit would be conferred on every devotee by the saint.

Vijayanand was a *sannyasi* from Madras. On his way to lake Manasarovar in the Himalayas he heard of Baba's greatness and sojourned at Shirdi. There he met one Somadevaswami, a *sannyasi* from Hardwar, who spoke of the great hardships one has to face in a trek to Manasarovar. Vijayanand at once gave up his intention to go there. Later when he went to the Dwarakamai, Baba flew into a rage and yelled, "Drive out this unworthy *sannyasi*!" Baba was right. For, the fear of discomfort showed the unripeness of Vijayanand's *sannyasa* (renunciation). Two days after, Vijayanand received a letter from Madras informing him that his mother was seriously ill. He came to Baba to take his permission to be at his mother's bedside during her last moments. Baba knew that such a step is spiritually ruinous both to Vijayanand and to the institution of *sannyasa*. And he wanted to safe his devotee's soul above all. For he knew what was in store for the unsuspecting devotee. Baba curtly said to him, "If you are so attached to your mother why did you take to *sannyasa*? Go and sit quiet at the *wada* and wait for a few days with patience. In the *wada* there are many robbers; so bolt your doors and be vigilant; thieves will carry away everything. Wealth is transient and the body is subject to decay and death. Keeping this in mind do your duty without attachment to this world and the next. He who thus surrenders himself to the Lord's will shall enjoy bliss. The Lord helps him who remembers Him with love. Your store of past merits is great and so you have come here. Remember what I said and begin the study of *The Bhagawata* from tomorrow. Do three *saptahas* (week long reading) with devotion. The Lord will be pleased and you will attain Peace."

Vijayananda duly commenced reading of *The Bhagawata* in the solitude of Lendi. After two readings he was exhausted, returned to the *wada* and on the third day he passed away, resting on Bade Baba's lap! Baba then told the people to preserve the body for one day before performing

the last rites. And he proved wise. For the next day the police turned up and after enquiry into the death found nothing amiss and allowed the people to bury the body.

In retrospect, we have to note that the thief that Baba mentioned to Vijayananda was death: the senses and the nine openings of man's body are the doors which Baba asked him to close either through *yoga* or devotion. For, it is said in *The Bhagavadgita* and other scriptures that a departing soul would attain that about which it thinks at the moment of death. So Baba, prepared his soul to leave the body with its attention focused on the Lord. Else Vijayananda would have died a lost soul, his heart fallen off from the ideal and duty of *sannyasi* namely dispassion, and plunged in attachment to his mother and grief at her death. Further, Vijayananda died in the blessed presence of Sai Baba which is incomparably better than dying at his home.

Lala Lakshmichand, a clerk in a Bombay office, had a strange dream on one night in October 1910. He saw an old bearded man standing, surrounded by his devotees in a part of the Santa Cruz area. Later at Das Ganu's devotional singing at his friend's house, he recognized in Baba's portrait displayed there, the saint that appeared to him in his dream! Hearing about Baba's powers, he decided to visit Shirdi at the earliest. At 8 p.m. the same day, his friend Shankar Rao called on him and asked him if he would accompany him to Shirdi. His joy knew no bounds. He at once borrowed Rs. 15/- from his cousin and started for Shirdi. Along the way the two pilgrims did *bhajan* for sometime and then, meeting some Moslems that lived near Shirdi, enquired of them about Baba. They told the two friends that Baba was really a great saint.

When they arrived at Kopergaon, Lakshmichand wanted to purchase some guavas for Baba but soon forgot to take them. When their tonga was nearing Shirdi he remembered that he failed to buy guavas. In a few moments, he saw an old woman carrying guavas in basket on her head and she came running after the tonga. When he stopped the tonga and purchased some of the fruits the woman gave him the rest of them and said, "Offer them to Baba on my behalf." They found her gesture a bit odd and thought that she was probably related to the old *fakir*.

When they saw Baba at the *musjid*, the latter said, looking at Lakshmichand, "What a cunning fellow! He does *bhajan* on the way and yet enquires from others about me. Why ask others? We must see everything for ourselves; just see whether your dream has come true or not. But why borrow money from a Marwari friend for this trip. Are you now satisfied?" What a chain of mysterious coincidences, which ultimately prove to be the deliberate design of the saint to get his devotee to him.

H.V. Sathe had a Brahmin cook by name Megha, a pious youth who always chanted the Lord's name *Namassivaya*. Sathe once sent him to Baba. On the way he was much distressed on knowing that the saint was a moslem. Yet his master's counsel prevailed and he reached Shirdi. When he approached the *musjid*, Baba flew into a rage and cried out, "Kick out that rascal"! Pointing his finger at Megha, Baba said, "You are a high caste brahmin and I am a moslem; you will lose your caste by coming here. Get out!" He wondered at Baba's omniscience but his heart did not feel at ease at Shirdi and so he left. But would Baba leave his lamb to stray? Megha again returned to Shirdi and Baba silently helped him outgrow his inhibition. Megha came to believe that Sai Baba was the *avatar* of his chosen diety Lord Siva. Being traditional in his outlook he insisted on worshipping Baba with *bel* leaves and bathing him in the holy water of the river

Godavari. He used to fetch water from the river everyday, walking eight miles in all and perform his worship.

Megha used to worship all the deities in the local shrines every day before worshipping Baba. One day he found the shrine of Khandoba still unopened and so, after worshipping the rest of the village gods, went to *Dwarakamkai* to worship Baba. But Baba insisted on his worshipping Khandoba first and said that the shrine was by then opened by the priest. He went and found it was so! This incident increased Megha his faith in Baba and in the efficacy of following one method of worship assiduously.

On the holy day of *Makara Sankranthi* (the entry of sun in the sign of Capricorn on the 14th of January), Megha wanted to worship Baba by besmearing his body with sandal paste and then bathing him in the water of holy Godavari. Baba who was at first unwilling had to yield to his persistent appeals. When Megha brought the river water, Baba appealed to him not to bathe him; for as a *fakir* he is not expected to permit it. But to Megha, Baba was Siva and how else could he be worshipped? At last Baba insisted that only his head be bathed and the body spared the ritual. Though verbally Megha agreed, when Baba sat on the bathing seat, he just poured the water from the pot all over Baba's body, uttering loudly the name of Lord Siva, *Hara hara Mahadev*. But the next moment, he was amazed to see that only Baba's head was wet!

Megha also worshipped Baba's photograph at his lodge everyday. Early one morning. Megha was lying on his bed awake but with his eyes closed. Baba appeared clearly before his inner eye, threw *akshatas* (rice coloured with turmeric) at him and said, "Megha, draw a trident". Then he disappeared. When he opened his eyes there was no one and the doors were closed; but *akshatas* were seen strewn all about him! Megha latter asked Baba whether he should really draw a trident. Baba said, "it was my direct order and my words are never uttered in vain. I need no doors to enter. I am everywhere."

Returning to his lodging, Megha drew the figure of a trident on the wall and worshipped it. The very next day, a devotee from Pune gave a *sivalinga* to Baba and he gave it to Megha saying, "Lord Siva has come to you; serve Him". Just at that moment Kakassaheb Dixit who was chanting Sai's name at his lodge, had the vision of a beautiful *sivalinga*. And in a few moments he saw Megha bringing the same from the *Dwarakamai*.

When Megha passed away in 1912, Baba passed his hands over the body and said, "This was my true devotee." He wept like an ordinary mortal, and after covering Megha's body with flowers, joined the funeral procession. The obsequies were completed. Baba returned to the *musjid* and gave a funeral dinner to all at his own expenses.

Pure devotion, we have seen in the case of Megha, craves for nothing but grace and it gets it. But grace is no grace if can not correct some less mature attitudes of the devotes. And we can cite a few such instances in Baba's case.

In 1916, a party of four - a man , his wife, his daughter and his sister-in-law – visited Shirdi on there way from Madras to Benaras and stayed there for a few days. They belonged to the Ramadasi sect. They heard that Sai Baba was a great saint and that he gave liberal gifts of money

to those who sang devotional songs. They sang melodiously in Baba's presence; but all of them except the wife inwardly craved for gifts of money but the wife wanted only Baba's grace. One day Baba blessed her with the vision of her chosen deity, Lord Sri Rama, in himself. When she recounted her experience to her husband, he did not believe it. Later, one night, he had a dream-vision: He was being tied hand and foot and put in a prison by the police. While Baba looked on, the man asked his protection. Baba said that he was only paying for a sin he might have committed earlier in that life or in a previous one. The man requested Baba to burn out his sins by his power. "Do you have such faith in my power?". Asked Baba and the man said that he had. Baba then asked him to close his eyes for a moment. When the man opened them again, he found himself free and the policemen dead. When he was rejoicing Baba taunted him by saying, "Now the officers will arrest you for this crime of killing the police!" The man was desperate and he fell at Baba's feet crying, "There is no one to save me except you!". Baba asked him to close his eyes again for a moment and he was free! When he bowed to Baba in gratitude, Baba asked, "Is there any difference between this bowing of your head (in *namaskara*) and the previous ones?" The man confessed that his earlier *namaskaras* were done with a desire for gifts of money whereas the latest was expressive of his real faith in Baba's divinity. Besides, he said, his earlier *namaskaras* were not hearty; for he then had a prejudice that Baba, being a moslem, is unfit to be so bowed to. Baba then said, "Do you not worship moslem idols like the Panja, the Tabut and the deity Kadbibi? Why pretend that you have no faith in Moslem gods?" The man confessed the truth of Baba's words and prayed that he be graced with the darshan of his *guru* Samarth Ramadas. Baba then asked him to turn back and see and there stood the great saint Ramadas! When the saint disappeared, the man turned to Baba and said, "Baba, you look old; how old are you?" Baba replied, "What, you say that I am old? Run with me, I shall see," and he started running. The man tried to overtake him but Baba disappeared in the dust raised by his own feet. The dream was over.

The dream had completely shattered the man's skepticism and faith in Baba sprouted in his heart. Next morning when he went to *Dwarakamai*, Baba gave him Rs. 2/- and some sweetmeats as *prasad*. And blessed him. His craving for money was alchemised thereafter into craving for grace and then the blessing was given by Baba.

The large number of accounts we have considered should not create the false impression that all those that were so drawn to Baba and helped were only Hindus. There were quite a good number of moslems who considered Baba a great moslem saint and who were graced by him accordingly.

Imambhai Chotai Khan of Aurangabad was once threatened with litigation and he went to a Moslem saint named Darves Shah who directed him to Shirdi and gave him some clues to confirm whether Baba was really a great *aulia* (literally means a 'friend of god'). He told Imambhai to repeat the first chapter of "The Koran" silently behind Baba's back and not to accept gifts of money from him. When Imambhai saw Sai Baba,the latter was standing in a street and a lady taking his *darshan*. Quietly Imambhai went and stood at a distance behind Baba and recited the said verse from the Koran silently. At once Baba turned round and shouted at him, "Who are you? Why have you come to ask me about something as though you are my father?" and went on heaping foul abuse on him. When they went to *Dwarakamai*,Baba did not allow Imambhai to step into it. When Kakasaheb Dixit interceded and said, "Baba, why are you angry

with him?" Baba said, "Do you call him a child? He has beaten his master!" That was a reference to what Imambhai did sometime earlier as a policeman; he beat a Christian 'master' who failed to give information in his investigation, and the 'master' fell senseless, bleeding all over. The higher officer advised Imambhai to run away. So he resigned his job and ran up to Shirdi to escape prosecution through Baba's grace. Noticing that Imambhai sincerely repented for his misdeeds, Baba touched his head as a sign of blessing and said, "Do not fear. *Allah Malik!*" Later everything went off well to Imambhai.

On a later visit Baba did not permit him to return to his native village but, said, "People should not go. If they go there will be storms and balls of fire and lots of trouble." Imambhai could not grasp the significance of these words and was impatient to go home. So he started by walk. At about 5-30 p.m., he reached Vari, twelve miles from Shirdi. At sunset, as he walked along the banks of river Surala, the patil (a village officer) warned him, "Do not go. The weather is cloudy. You will have trouble if you go." Imambhai thought that he could cover the remaining distance of four miles easily. But when he covered some three miles or so there was a storm and suddenly lightning struck a huge peepal tree which he had just passed. The tree crashed and split into two and Imambhai had to turn his gaze away from the blinding flash. And lo, he saw Sai Baba standing behind him. There were two tawny dogs with him. When Imabhai bowed to him
Sai Baba disappeared. Emboldened by this assurance of Baba's protection, he proceeded to wade through the river near his village. He was surprised to find the water knee-deep all through.
When he reached the other bank and turned round, he saw that actually the river was in spate, running high about the bank i.e., twenty feet deep! Baba's words about storm and balls of fire came true.

Immabhai says, "Baba gave spiritual uplift to two moslems that I know. Sheik Abdullah of my village came here (i.e., to Shirdi). Baba spoke to him words of *vairagya* (dispassion). 'If we die today, the third day would follow. What is the use of house, land and other things to us?' Sheik Abdullah returned to our village. He left his house and property to his wife and children, wandered in the streets and spent his nights near tombs, muttering something always. He lived upon what people gave him and did not care if he got nothing. He had developed wonderful powers during these twelve years. Once he asked me not to go on my journey as, at a particular place named by him on the path, there would be a serpent. As it was daylight I did not heed his warning. But I found the serpent exactly in the place named by him.

Abbas Sait, a beedie-seller of my place once said to Adbullah 'Why do you behave like a madman, giving up wife and relations?' Abdullah said, 'You will come to know the same!' Abdullah flung his closed fist, as though he threw something at Abbas Sait and said, 'You also become like that!' From that time the latter gave up his business, home and relations and is still wandering about.

"In Bhopal of Varhad (Behar) one Anwar Khan lived; once he came to Baba and told him, 'I do not want *samsara*'. He lived in the *chavadi* here for twelve months. Baba then gave him a *mantra*, *'Bismilla, kuliyo hio valkafiraono nabudo Mabuduna'* etc., from the Koran and told him to repeat it hundred and one times at midnight. Then he was to recite *'Davut'*. Baba then gave him prasad of peda and told him to go to Baghadad in Arabia. He then went to Bombay where Haji Kasim of Bombay help him with free passage to Arabia. He has never returned thence."

"Hida Beg of Kanad near Aurangabad came to Baba and stayed here (at Shirdi). Moulvi Yakub of Delhi was here then, reading the Koran daily, sitting in the *mandap* (frontyard of the *musjid*) during day and night. One night about 8 p.m. Baba told Hida beg, 'Do not stay here. Go to the cantonment near Kanad (i.e., Aurangabad) and change your name as Punjab Shah. Go and sit there; eat what you get'. He is still living there as a saint and people revere him."

"Mohammad Khan, a Rohilla of Newasa, was here with Baba. Once he lifted the curtain to see Baba, who was talking to Mahalsapathy (i.e., at night). Strange to say, he could not see Baba! He was getting queer and crazy. His younger brother who was at Newasa, came to Shirdi to take him. Baba gave *udi* and sent him back and he then became alright."

"One Maddushah, a *fakir* at Meran, in Khandesh came to Shirdi about 1913 and entreated Baba to give him Rs.700/- for some urgent need of his. He cried and cried. Baba directed Bapu Sahib Jog to give him the money. He brought Rs.700/- all in silver coins, and placed them before Baba. Baba told the two boys – Gulab, son of Kondaji, and Lakshman Baba Borker Shimpi – to give the money to the *fakir* who was seated in the *mandap* before him. The boys pocketed Rs. 200/- and delivered only Rs. 500/- to the visitor. The *fakir* wept and was grumbling for two or three days. Baba did nothing. So the man took *udi* and went away on foot. Near Neemgaon, a *tonga* came up and stopped before him. One Irrus Shah, a Parsi working as a revenue officer in the Nizam State, alighted from the *tonga*, gave him food and then Rs.200/- saying, 'Are you content?' Then Irrus Shah came to Shirdi, and told all present that he had a dream in which Baba told him to go by *tonga* to Shirdi, and said that he would see a *fakir* near Neemagaon carrying a tiger-skin, that he should feed the *fakir* (as he would be hungry) and hand him over Rs.200/- which is the balance of money for which he was pining. So he came in a tonga with food and money and gave the same to the *fakir*!"

"A moslem from Lassor in Nizam's state came to Baba and cried. Wanting Rs.400/- or 500/- to meet some urgent need. Baba told him to go and sit under the banyan tree for stool, that a vessel-full of coins will be found there. Next morning he went there and stumbled upon a very heavy vessel, evidently full of treasure. He could not lift it and so he came to Baba at the *chavadi*. When he returned, it could not be traced and the man cried. Baba said that one Ganu Kadu of Rui had carried it away and so nothing could be done. That Ganu Kadu became a rich man. This Lasoori went back in grief and poverty.

While most of the devotees were willing to trust their welfare completely to Baba there were some who tried to get what they thought was the best from him. And Baba had characteristic ways of teaching people that they should deserve what they ask for even if it were to be the noblest end.

Abdul Kadir visited Sai Baba in 1915 and stayed at the *takia*. One day when Baba came there on his stroll, Kadir begged Baba to give him *fakiri* (i.e., the inner state of a true *fakir* or *sadhu*) as he wanted to become a saint. Baba at first dissuaded him; but when he persisted, Baba flung his closed fist towards Kadir, as though he was flinging something invisible at him. Thereafter, Kadir's manner and talk had completely changed. He gave moral advice to people and behaved like Baba, sometimes abusing them in veiled language. Sometimes, picking up a stone, he

threatened to throw it at someone. His manner grew more and more unmanageable. This went on for a month and a half and then Baba met him at the frontyard of *Dwarakamai* and saying *'Lav bale, idar'* drew his closed fist towards himself as though he were taking back something from Kadir. At once Kadir got back his original state of mind. He stayed on for two more weeks at Shirdi and then with Baba's permission, went to Pune where he set up a *beedie* shop near Baba Jan's margosa tree. (Babajan was an old moslem lady, a great saint and the first *guru* of Sri Meher Baba). It is evident that Abdul Kadir was not yet ripe for what he had asked and so Baba gave him a taste of it and took it away.

The case of Kusha Bhau illustrates how Baba drew some of the misdirected souls to himself and saved them from spiritual ruin. Kusha Bhau found a *guru* in one Datta Maharaj who trained him in *yoga*. He used to press his *guru* to teach him black magic which yields some lesser super natural power. The *guru* had to yield to some extent and teach him cetain *mantras*. Henceforth, Kush Bhau practiced the same intently and wore an iron bangle. He could utter a *mantra* and produce sweetmeats mysteriously, out of nothing, and distribute them to folks. He was forbidden from eating the same himself.

When Kusha Bhau was twenty two, his *guru* decided to retire into solitude in the Himalayas and took him along up to Delhi, there he instructed his disciple to resort to Sai Baba of Shirdi as his elder.

Kusha Bhau accordingly visited Shirdi in 1888. On seeing him Baba flew into a rage and did not permit him to enter *Dwarakamai* until he agreed to throw away the iron bangle and stop the mysterious transference of sweetmeats which amounted to theft. After much inner conflict, Kusha Bhau had to yield; for such was his *guru's* parting instruction. He threw away the iron bangle and stopped producing the sweets. He stayed at Shirdi and lived by begging. Baba ordered him to sit in a corner of the mosque and go on reading the *Dasabodha* of Samarth Ramadas during day. He spent three years at Shirdi and later went on visiting Baba often for the next six years. During that whole period of nine years Baba used to tell him often to see 'the person with three heads'. Obviously, the reference was to Lord Dattatreya. Henceforth Kusha Bhau started visiting Gangapur, the holy place of Lord Datta. Once, on Baba's order he read the holy work *'Guru Charitra'* one hundred and eight times, taking three days for each reading. Then occurred an interesting incident.

Kusha Bhau was fasting on an *ekadasi* day. And Baba asked him what food he took on such a day. Kusha Bhau said that he took *kandamul*, something like sweet potato. Baba deliberately distorted the pronunciation of the Sanskrit word as *kanda* which, in Marathi means, 'onion'. So Baba picked up an onion and asked Kusha Bhau to eat it. The latter was in a dilemma whether to obey tradition which forbade eating of onions or the *guru's* word. At last, as a way out, he said to Baba, "If you eat it, I shall also eat". Then both of them ate the onions. When visitors arrived, Bada made fun of Kusha Bhau saying, "Look at this Bamniya! (a belittling abbreviation of the word 'brahmin') He is eating onions on the holy *ekadasi* day"! Kusha Bhau protested saying, "Baba ate it and so I did". Baba categorically denied that he had eaten any onions. He said that he ate a sweet potato while Kusha Bhau ate onions. To prove his contention Baba at once vomited and to the amazement of Kusha Bhau, pieces of sweet potato feel from Baba's mouth and there were no pieces of onion!

Shrewd Kusha Bhau regarded Baba's vomit as his *prasad,* (consecrated food) and at once ate it. Baba tried to stop him through curses and kicks. But being a great *sadhaka,* Kusha Bhau knew that by taking *guru's uchhishta,* i.e., the left over of a *guru's* meal as *prasad,* a devotee automatically acquires the status of a disciple which is above that of a devotee. It placed a moral binding on the *guru* to secure the highest good to his disciple. And Baba scrupulously avoided accepting anyone as his disciple. But Kusha Bhau made himself one. This is not matter of mere shrewdness but it is shrewdness born of unbounded love for and faith in the *guru* as God himself. He says "Baba abused me, kicked me, and beat me. But I did not mind all this in the least, as I was overjoyed at having got his *uchhishta* as *prasad*. I also knew that as with Akkalkot Maharaj, so with Baba, his beating and abuse were auspicious and beneficial. In an instant Baba's mood changed. His anger, real or pretended, gaze way to warm appreciation of my unquestioning faith in him and he lovingly placed his hand on my head and blessed me. He said that I would henceforth have the power, by barely thinking of him and holding up my palms, to pour abundance of *udi* from my palms. This miraculously produced *udi* could be distributed by me to those who have faith and want *prasad* from me, and it would remove troubles. This power was at once vested in me, and did not require any *japa* on my part. The power of producing *udi* which I have got is communicable by me. But the would be recipient of the power would have to
undergo a rigorous course of an austere discipline like, for instance, six months of sexual abstinence. The production of this *udi* is not the result of any *mantra,* but is the result merely of remembering Sai Baba. The *pedas* I produced were merely fetched (i.e., transferred) from elsewhere. That power did not include the production at will of *udi*. Now it is production of *udi* by thinking of Sai. Formerly, it was merely transferring *pedas* from one place to another." The implications are evident. The production of *pedas* was a power that he squeezed from his *guru*'s unwilling acquiescence to his demands and was intended to win fame for himself and thus it boosted his ego. Besides, its distribution meant distribution of stolen things, which polluted the unsuspecting recipients. The production of *udi* was won by humility and faith in Baba and every remembrance of Baba that had to precede its production made Kusha Bhau remember that he was but a humble medium of Baba's blessing and thus it strengthened his humility and faith in
the saint. It also healed the sick and thus won the hearts of recipients to faith in Baba. A world of difference indeed!

There is another case of a man asking Baba for something that he was totally unfit to have and Baba's sense of humour in answering him is wonderful. A Man amassed a lot of wealth and owned many houses and much landed property. Once he had a fancy to complete his achievements by tasting *Brahmagnana* i.e., perfect enlightenment. He heard that a great saint named Sai Baba was capable of bestowing on anyone that asked for it; and he wanted to visit Baba in this connection. When he confided his plans to a close friend of his, the latter frankly told him the truth, "What you are going to ask of Baba is not such a simple thing which a man like you, whose heart is wedded to wealth and woman, can ever dream of getting". But one day he saw Baba and said, "Baba, hearing that you show *Brahman* to all those that resort to you for the same, I have come all the way for it." Baba replied, "Oh friend, all the people that come to me ask for money, health and children. Rare is a person like you who wants nothing less than the highest spiritual realization which I am most anxious to give to my devotees! I shall soon grant you the experience of *Brahman*".

Then Baba managed to engage him with other conversation and make him loose sight of the object of his arrival at Shirdi. Then he called a boy and told him to get a hand loan of Rs. 5/- from one Nandu Marwadi. The boy soon returned empty-handed and said that the man was away from his home. Baba then sent him to a grocer named Bala and later to a few others but with the same result. The seeker after *'Brahmagnana'* grew restless and Baba said, "Oh, friend, did you not understand that all the while I was trying to show you *Brahman*? For seeing *Brahman* one has to surrender five things to the Lord-(1) the five *pranas*, (2) the five senses, (3) mind, (4) intellect and (5) ego. The path of *Brahmagnana* is as hard to tread as the sharp edge of a razor."

The point of this whole episode is brought out by a similar experience of another devotee. He asked Baba to show him God. Then Baba sent a boy to Bagchand Marwadi for a loan of Rs. 100/- but the boy returned and reported that the Marwadi had no money and that he wanted his *namaskaras* to be conveyed to Baba instead. Then Baba sent the boy to another money lender but the response was the same. Then Baba sent for Nana Chandorkar and asked him for Rs. 100/- Nana sent a chit to Bagchand Marwadi who at once sent the amount. Nana said to the visitor who wanted to be shown God, "Everything is just like this in this world."

When Baba sent for the money it was not forth coming; for Baba was a *fakir* and the moneylender was afraid that the amount may not be repaid. When Nana, a big officer, wanted, it was promptly sent. One must deserve before one can ask for anything. And that was Baba's lesson.

In the case of the earlier rich man who wanted to see *Brahman*, though he had lots of money in his pocket, he did not offer to give the meagre amount of Rs. 5/- for which Baba had been repeatedly sending the boy but kept looking on as though he had no money. And how can such a slave of money hope to get *Brahmagnana?* Baba had just demonstrated the famous saying of Jesus Christ that no man can serve two masters, god and Mammon.

Once a venerable old Moslem, Sidik Falke by name, came from Kalyan to seek Baba's blessings. He visited Mecca and Medina and was proud of it. He probably expected Baba to recognize him of his own accord. So he lived in the *chavadi* and at times sat in the open courtyard of the mosque. Baba ignored him completely for nine long months. To the utter amazement of all, Baba never allowed him even to climb the steps of the mosque. At last Falke requested Shama to intercede with Baba for him. On a convenient occasion, Shama said, "Baba, why do you drive out the good old *Haji* from the mosque while you allow so many others to come to you freely? Why not show mercy on him and bless him?"

Baba replied, "Shama, you are too young to understand these things. If the *fakir* does not allow, what can I do? Without His grace, who can even enter the mosque?" Shama still pleaded for consideration for Sidik Falke. Baba finally said, "Well, go to the Haji and ask him whether he will come to the narrow foot-path near the Barvi well." Shama went, and conveyed the same to the old man. The old man said that he was ready to do so. Baba said, "Ask him whether he is willing to pay me the sum of Rs. 40,000/- in four installments". Again the Haji conveyed his willingness to pay even for lakhs. Baba again said, We are going to cut goat in the *musjid*; so ask him whether he would like to have mutton, haunch or testicles of the goat." The *Haji* replied that he would be happy to receive even a crumb from Baba's earthen pot. On hearing the *Haji's* reply

Baba flared up and with his own hands threw out all the pots in the mosque, walked towards the *Haji* and, shouted at him, "Why do you brag and fancy yourself great and parade yourself as a *Haji?* Do you read the holy Koran like this? You are proud of your pilgrimage to Mecca but you do not know Me!" Leaving the *Haji* amazed at his behavior, Baba went back to the mosque purchased a basketful of mangoes and sent them to the *Haji*. Then Baba took out Rs. 55/- from his pocket and gave him the money. Henceforth the *Haji* could visit the mosque freely.

Saguna Meru Naik lived in Goa when he was 10 or 12 years old. Every day he used to take the cattle for grazing . On one such occasion he saw a *sadhu* who beckoned to him. The boy was frightened and ran home and told his mother of what had happened. The pious lady looked on all *sadhus* as the forms of Lord Dattatreya. She accompanied her son to the place where the *sadhu* was. The *sadhu* asked her for food. The lady gave him *sida* (a kind of gram) and fire-wood for cooking it. Then he signed to young Saguna Meru and asked him, "When are you coming?" Sagun did not reply. The *sadhu* smiled and left the place.

Six years after, Sagun came to Belgaum for doing business and stayed there for seven years, then a devotee of Lord Dattatreya by name Dattopant became his friend and attracted Sagun to the spiritual path. After some time Sagun wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Narrasobawadi, a famous *Dattasthan*. There he had the good fortune of meeting the famous saint and devotee of Lord Dattatreya, Sri Tembe Swamiji Maharaj. The saint, when he saw Sagun, said to him, "You are the man of a great *durbar*, What more should I tell you?" Sagun could not understand the significance of these words at that time.

Two or three years afterwards, Sagun went to Hyderabad and was introduced to one Seth who was a devotee of Sai Baba. He took Sagun to Shirdi along with him in 1912.

Baba was returning to the mosque after his usual walk to Lendi and met them on the way. A large group of people were following. Sai Baba addressed Sagun in Kannada, "Whence do you come? What do you want?" Sagun could not reply. For two to three days Sagun felt a strong urge to return to Hyderabad. So he sought Baba's permission. Baba kept quiet and Sagun had to stay away. On the fifth day Baba told him that his mind was still wavering. Then he recalled the event of his early days: "You don't seem to remember my coming to your place. You were young and brought cows to the tank when I saw you. Your mother gave me *sida* and fire-wood. Do you remember now?"

Sagun vividly remembered what had happened fourteen years earlier. He then experienced an outburst of faith in and love for Baba and sat gazing fixedly at him.

Baba smiled and said, "Why do you stare at me like a mad man? Our parents are here and we must stay here. You look after me and I will look after you". Henceforth, Sagun stayed away at Shirdi running a hotel and he wanted nothing. He then realized why Sri Tembe Swamiji Maharaj said that he was the man of a great *durbar* and what the *sadhu* meant when he said, fourteen years earlier, "When are you coming to me?"

Sagun's hotel was situated just opposite the place where pilgrims to Shirdi alighted. One such pilgrim was Tendulkar from Betul District. After taking bath, he had *darshan* of Sai Baba in the

musjid and he invited Baba to lunch with him. Baba smiled and kept quite. This went on for four or five days, and everyday Tendulkar ordered two meals, ate one and asked Sagun to keep one covered up.

One night, at 10 o'clock Sagun was cleaning his vessels for milking his cows. A *sadhu* approached him and said, "Give me the meal kept for me". Sagun was a little surprised at his demand but served him cheerfully from what was kept covered up. After finishing his dinner, he said, "Call the man who ordered this for me". Sagun sent for Tendulkar but he was sleeping soundly and did not wake up. "Let it be", said the *sadhu*, "I belong to the *Nath panth* (Nath tradition). Be feeding the hungry like this. God will do you good".

All the devotees of Sai at Shirdi came to know of this incident. Shama asked Baba whether he went to Sagun for meal the previous night. Baba smiled and said, "I ate and returned. If anyone comes to us for food we should not turn him away. If we have nothing to give, at least a little jaggery should be given".

The Refuge of His Devotees

As is natural with every saint, the people that flocked to Baba were of various kinds. Some came for alleviation of misery. Some wanted better standard of living. Others wanted to know about him through firsthand experience and not from what others said of him. Lastly, there were the ardent seekers after spiritual illumination. Naturally the first two categories were the largest in number and the fourth were the fewest. We shall see how all these people were received and blessed by Baba.

Gopal Rao Gund was a Circle Inspector at Kopergaon. He married thrice but had no issues. He heard of Sri Sai Baba, sought his blessings and later had a son. It was in gratitude for this blessing that Gopal Rao Gund thought of celebrating the annual *urs* in honor of Sai Baba and had actually started the custom in 1897. The District Collector's permission was obtained for the celebration but the devotees were confronted with the problem of providing drinking water for the large number of people that flocked there. One of the wells at Shirdi had very brackish water. The water was miraculously turned into sweet drinking water when Sri Sai Baba threw flowers into it. Then there was Damu Anna Kasar of Ahmednagar who too had no issue even though he married twice. It was only with Sri Sai Baba's blessing that he had sons. He used to share the expenses of the *urs* with Gopal Rao Gund.

Baba often helped his devotee out of tight corners in his own mysterious ways. Uddhavesh of Dehnu left for Dwaraka along with a group of pilgrims from Bombay. He had all the tickets of his party in his purse when they boarded the ship. As the steamer was over-crowded, Uddhavesh had to stand on the gallery. When he put his hand in his pocket, his purse with all the money and tickets slipped and fell in the sea. He was embarrassed. So he at once wrote to Baba of his plight.Even before his letter reached Shirdi, Baba appeared in the dream of his son, Girdhar Gopal of Dehnu, as a well-dressed priest, and told him. "Your father is at Dwaraka and he has no money with him; so send it to him." Girdhar awoke and finding it a mere dream slept again. Again the priest appeared and commanded him to send the money at once. Next day, money was

sent by telegraphic money order and Uddhavesh was surprised to receive it. Long after, when Uddhavesh went to Shirdi, Baba told him, "I got the money sent for you."

Mrs. Malanbai, daughter of D.R. Joshi Devgaonkar suffered from tuberculosis. All medicines having failed, she was taken to Baba at Shirdi. Baba asked her to lie down on a blanket and take nothing but water. She carefully followed these instructions but after a week or so she died one early morning. Baba was then in the *chavadi*. For the first time in Shirdi history Baba did not leave the *chavadi* though it was past 8 a.m. The girl's parents were making ready for the funeral when Malanbai appeared to breathe, opened her eyes and looked around as if frightened. Later she narrated her experience: "A dark person was carrying me away; very much frightened, I cried for Baba's help. Baba took his staff and beat him, snatched me from his hands and carried me to *chavadi*." Even though she did not see the *chavadi* she gave an accurate description of the place. Just at the moment of her revival Baba left his *chavadi,* crying loudly in wild abuse, striking his staff against the ground and he proceed straight to Dixit's *wada* where the girl was staying.

Rajaballi Mohammad says, "I wanted only increase of faith. I wanted that at my death, I may die possessed of full *iman* or faith so that I may have a good end. I prayed to him (mentally) for that and asked for his blessings. He placed his hand on my head and blessed me. From that moment his blessings have borne fruit. My faith had steadily increased. Besides that, I have a great benefit from my faith in him and in his *udi*."

"Saints exist to give devotees temporal and spiritual benefits", Baba said, "I have come to give such good things to the devotee." Once, one of his devotees objected to people going to Baba for temporal benefit. Baba said to him. "Do not do that. My men first come to me for that only. They get their desires fulfilled; and comfortably placed in life, they follow me and progress further. I bring my men to me from long distances under many pleas. I seek them and bring them to me. They do not come (of their own accord). I draw them to me". These words are law even to-day.

One Bhimaji Patil of Narayanagaon developed a severe form of Tuberculosis, and was often spitting blood. Doctors failed to cure him and finally he was directed to see Sri Sai Baba by Nanasaheb Chandorkar. When Bhimaji arrived at Shirdi, Baba said that the disease was caused by the evil *karma* of a past life and he was unwilling to interfere with it. But the patient wept piteously and implored Baba for his blessing. Baba was moved and he said, "Do not fear, your sufferings have come to an end. Whoever steps into this *musjid* will be relieved of his sufferings, however bad they might be. The *Fakir* here is very kind". Soon the spitting of blood stopped and his condition took a turn for the better. Baba kept the patient in the house of one Bhimabai which look quiet unhygienic. Shortly after, the patient had two dreams. In the first dream he saw himself as a boy, being flogged by the teacher at school for not reciting his poetry lessons. In the second dream he saw a heavy road-roller moving up and down on his chest causing him infinite pain and agony. By the time he woke up, his disease was completely cured and with Baba's blessing and leave, he soon left Shirdi! In gratitude for Baba's grace Bhimaji started a new form of Baba– worship called *Sri Sai Satya Vrata Puja*, (modelled on *Sri Satya Narayana Vrata Puja*) at his home. Similarly, one Dattopant was relieved of his fourteen year old stomach-ache simply by Baba's touch.

Baba did not always cure a man's ailment simply by his word. He often advocated a course of treatment which actually contradicted all known medical opinion and which in common experience, was sure to aggravate the ailment. Once Shriman Booty had an attack of cholera. Dr. Pillai's efforts to cure it had failed and he had recourse to the master-physician, Sai Baba. Baba then prescribed him an infusion of almonds, walnuts and *pista* (a dry fruit) boiled in sugar and milk as his diet! This would, in common parlance, be considered fatal to such a patient. But the disease was cured by it. So too, Kaka Mahajani once suffered from violent diarrhoea. But he had to attend on Baba. So he kept a pot of water by his side and was often hurrying out to answer nature's call. He did not ask Baba for the cure because he had implicit faith that Baba knew all his needs. At that time the construction of the pavement of the *musjid* was going on. Suddenly, Baba, in his characteristic unaccountable manner, burst into a wild fury. Every one ran away and Kaka Mahajani was about to do the same. But Baba held him back by the hand, forced him to sit there, picked up a handful of groundnuts (or peanuts as some would call them) from a bag (left behind by one of those who ran away from there), blew off the chaff and gave the clean nuts to Kaka. He told Kaka to eat them and then continued his furious outburst of abuse. Baba too ate some of the nuts, drank a little water from a pitcher and gave the rest to Kaka and told him to drink it. When he did, fearing the worst aggravation of the ailment, Baba said to him, "Now your diarrhoea has stopped!" Indeed, it did. Something that should have aggravated the disease has actually cured it.

Once Nana had a painful boil on his buttock. Though he had immense faith in the power of Sai Baba to cure it, he knew too well that very often Baba took the suffering on himself. So he preferred to suffer. The doctors finally decided that it must be surgically opened. This prospect frightened Nana very much. For, "It is a difficult one to operate", said the surgeon, "and is even dangerous; however, don't get panicky. I'll come tomorrow". That night Nana slept with Baba's picture under his pillow! The next day, fifteen minutes before the operation was to commence, Nana was lying on his face on the bed. Suddenly a tile fell from the roof and, of all places, it hit the boil on Nana's buttock. It made Nana groan, but it burst the boil and expelled all the bad blood. The doctor examined it and told Nana that there was no need to operate it. Nana could have jumped with joy. After a few days Nana visited Sai Baba, and the first words that Baba spoke were, "I removed Nana's boil with my finger"!

Sometimes Baba's methods of effecting cures were less direct. Perhaps he sometimes felt it necessary for his kiddies to toughen through a process of suffering which he could well gauge to be neither too serious nor too painful. Especially, he seems to have taken care to see that the suffering raised the mental grit or courage of the patient. To this end he often ordered the patient to go away from him so that psychologically, he might get used to depend on Baba's grace and not on Baba's proximity.

Kakasaheb was laid up at Shirdi with high fever and sent a word to Baba through Shama. Baba curtly replied, "I am not a doctor; let him go to his house in Vile Parle". Shama was annoyed at his unexpected response. So he said, "He stayed here with great trust in you; how can he go now when he is laid up with fever?" Baba is not the one to yield. He just reiterated his order and did not even give *udi* for him. "What a mad fakir he is!" he thought, yet he had the sense to start on his homeward journey and went to the mosque to take leave of Baba. On seeing him Baba said, in a voice not too soft, "Go home! The fever will go even as it came, in four day's time. Don't lie

down on the bed but move about, eat *badam* (almonds), *pista* and *sira*." Then he gave *udi* and sent Shama to accompany him on his journey. Kaka's mind gained composure at the assurance of Baba. It was 11 o' clock at a night when they walked home in Vile Parle. Everyone at Kaka's home was surprised at Kaka's quick return this time, for he usually stayed on at Shirdi for several days. His wife was anxious about his health.

As for Baba's order Kaka took *sira* for his diet. Next day the fever increased. His wife, in her anxiety, called in a doctor who emphatically told Kaka not to move about but to rest himself, and gave him medicine. But Kaka adhered to Baba's order, kept moving about and refused to take the medicine. Everyone feared that Kaka would die and started reviling him for pawning away his sense to the absurdities of a mad *fakir*. The doctor grew impatient with Kaka's obstinacy and roared "What am I here for?" But Kaka kept his course. And on the ninth day the temperature fell and it showed 'normal'. Later when Kaka visited Shirdi again, the first question Baba asked was, "What did your people in Bombay say?" He knows it all.

Booty was once laid up with typhoid. He stayed in Dixit's *wada* at Shirdi. He was too weak even to go to *Dwarakamai* for Baba's *darshan*. Every day Shama used to carry him to Sri Baba and back. Baba just gave him *udi* and made him eat *sira*. In course of time Booty recovered without any need of medicines.

A wealthy merchant came to Shirdi in 1911, along with his palsied daughter. She could neither stand nor walk. She was carried into Baba's presence. Baba blessed her and asked them to stay at Shirdi. On the third day she began to use her legs a little. On the eighth day she was able to walk, to the wonder of all the devotees. So too the wife of one Ghiasis, an employee of the Railway Department, was cured of her paralysis by Sai Baba.

Nandaram Marvadi visited Shirdi at the time of the second great plague in 1911. Many were leaving the village in haste. One day when he passed by the Maruthi Temple some people seated there told him that his eyes were red with fever and that he might be struck down by plague. In great fear he rode on horseback to the temple where, on the advice of someone he offered a coconut and oil to the deity. Then he wanted to quit that place and sought Baba's leave. Baba , however, dissuaded him. "As long as I am alive I will not let you die", he said and gave him *udi*. He stayed on and his fever vanished.

One day Shama was wiping Baba's wet hands with a towel. Baba gazed at him playfully and pinched his cheek. Shama pretended anger and said, "Sai, why do you pinch me? We don't want a mischievous god who pinches us thus." Baba replied, "Oh Shama, during the seventy two births that you were with me, I never pinched you till now and you resent my touching you?" Shama said, "We want a god that will ever give us kisses and sweets to eat; we do not want any dignity, wealth or heaven from you. Let our faith in you be ever awake and alive." Baba lovingly replied, "Yes, I have indeed come for that. I have been feeding and nursing you all these lives and I have love and affection for you". Such was the intimacy between the Master and devotee.

Once this Shama was bitten by a venomous serpent on his little finger. The poison began to spread in his body and caused unbearable suffering and pain. Shama thought that his end was drawing near. His friends wanted to take him to the shrine of God Vithoba where many were

cured of snake bites. But such was Shama's faith in Baba that he ran to the mosque, to his beloved savior. Strangely enough, no sooner he stepped into the mosque than Baba flared up and shouted, "Oh vile priest, do not climb up. Beware if you do! Go get out! Go down" Poor Shama was mortified and stood there dumb-founded. Then Baba's expression and voice changed suddenly and, with his characteristic love and tenderness, he said "Don't fear. The *Fakir* is merciful and he will save you. Go and sit at home. Don't stair out. Have faith in me and be fearless". To his great surprise Shama found that the pain had already vanished and he felt that the poison was withdrawing to the finger. He returned home. Later Baba sent word to him through Tatya Patil and Kakasaheb Dixit that he could eat whatever he likes and should move about in the house but should not lie down and sleep. Shama did accordingly and was free from all trouble. It is interesting to reflect on this incident. Baba was shouting and fretting at the
poison in Shama's blood and not at Shama himself. Often Baba appeared to do the same at the unuttered evil propensities of many other devotees and his words did have such power as to drive them out.

When Kakasaheb Dixit was at Shirdi he was once suffering from severe pain in the leg. He found it hard even to walk a furlong. That evening Baba started for Nimgaon. Dixit accompanied him. Though they walked together for three miles Dixit suffered no pain!

A lady of Pune was childless. She believed that if she receives a coconut from Baba her wish would be fulfilled. But whenever she started for Shirdi some obstacle or the other cropped up and she had to give up. One night Baba appeared in her dream and gave her a coconut. Next Morning when she woke up, she actually found one in her bed! She was amazed at Baba's *leela* and vowed that if she were blessed with a child, she would offer it at Shirdi. Next year she was blessed with a son and she fulfilled her vow.

One Gadge Patil was transferred to a far off place. He could not visit Baba and was sorry for not taking his blessing before going there. Atlast, he started by train. When the train stopped at Kopergaon, the thought that he could not receive Baba's *udi* and blessing was too painful to him. The next moment he was surprised to find a small packet of *udi* in the window of the compartment. Long after, when he visited Shirdi, Baba told the other devotees that though Gadge Patil could not visit him earlier, he had sent him *udi*. Patil put the *udi* in a talisman and wore it.

I am ever with you

God, in all religions is the Omnipresent Spirit, the essence of all existence. Accordingly, the Perfect Master is he who like Sai Baba can, not only say "I am at Shirdi and everywhere" but also demonstrate it to his devotees.

About 1904 Nanasaheb Chandorkar was working as a *mamlatdar* at Jamner, nearly a hundred miles from Shirdi. His daughter Mainthai was pregnant and suffered labor pains for three days. Her condition was very serious. Having exhausted all other avenues of help, he finally prayed to Baba to save his daughter. Precisely at that time, at Shirdi, a devotee by name Ramgir Bua sought Baba's permission to return to his home in Khandesh. Baba then gave him permission but

asked him to proceed first to Jamner. There, he was to deliver a packet of *udi* and a devotional song written down on a piece of paper, at Nanasaheb Chandorkar's place and then go home. Ramgir bua was willing to do as Baba said but, he said, he had only Rs.2/- with him which was just sufficient to take him upto Jalgaon which was thirty miles this side of Jamner. He had not the money to proceed from Jalgaon to Jamner. Baba gave him no money but assured him that all that was needed would be provided for. Then Baba gave Ramgir an *arti* song written by Shama on a piece of paper and *udi*. We have to note that Baba used to address Ramgir as 'Bapugir Bua'.

Ramgir Bua promptly started by train and reached Jalgaon at 2-45 a.m. He had only two annas (or twelve paise) with him. He saw all other passengers engaging *tongas* for other places and was wondering whether Baba wanted him to walk the distance of thirty miles. Just at that moment a peon arrived there calling out, "Who is Bapugir Bua of Shirdi?" When Ramgir Bua introduced himself, the peon said that he was sent by Nanasaheb with a *tonga* to receive him.

The peon and Ramgir Bua got into the *tonga* and proceeded fast towards Jamner. On the way, when they came to a brook, the coachman took the horses to the stream for drinking water. The peon then offered breakfast to Ramgir Bua. But as he had a beard and mustache Bapugir took him for a Moslem and so was unwilling to eat it. The peon assured him that he was a Hindu of Kshatriya (or warrior) caste and the breakfast was prepared and sent for him(i.e Ramgir Bua) by Nana. Ramgir took the breakfast. Soon the *tonga* reached the outskirts of Jamner. Ramgir alighted at a spot to answer the calls of nature. When he again returned to the road, he was puzzled to see that the coach and the peon had left.

However, as the village was near, he enquired and arrived at Nanasaheb's house. There he learned about Mainthai's critical condition and realized why Baba had asked him to go first to Jamner to deliver the *udi* packet.

Nanasaheb received the *udi* and the song. *Udi* was given to Mainthai and the *arti* song was sung before Baba's picture. Immediately Mainthai delivered a child and the danger was past. And Nanasaheb wondered how Baba knew that Mainthai's life was in danger. When Ramgir Bua thanked Nanasaheb for having sent a *tonga* and a peon to Jalgaon, Nana was amazed. For he had no *tonga* and no peon to send to Jalgaon! Nor did he know that anyone was coming to him from Shirdi. Who could the *tonga man*, the peon and the horses be? The truth flashed in Ramgir Bua's mind in a trice. Only Baba addressed him as 'Bapugir Bua' and precisely that was how the peon called out to him at Jalgaon railway station. And had not Baba assured him that all that was needed would provided for? But why not he (Baba) himself go as mysteriously to deliver the *udi* to Nana? Only because Baba wanted everyone that witnessed the miracle to see for himself how he could go to any length to protect his devotee.

Indeed, there are cases of Baba going to people in distant towns and cities in his own form, in his 'double'. In 1917 Appasaheb Kulkarni was posted at Thana. He used to worship a picture of Baba in his house. One day he went to Bhivandi on a proposed camp of seven days. On the third day after his departure, a *fakir* who resembled Sai Baba turned up at his house. Mrs. Kulkarni and her children asked him whether he was Sai Baba. He said that he was not Sai Baba but his obedient servant. Then he asked for *dakshina*. Mrs. Kulkarni gave him Re.1/-. The *fakir* received it, gave her a packet of *udi* to be kept in her worship and went away.

Mrs. Kulkarni and her children were very happy at this miracle of Sai Baba. But a great miracle was in store for them. Owing to some unexpected turn of events Appasaheb Kulkarni returned home on the third day and was sorely disappointed to know that he had very narrowly missed a chance of seeing Sai Baba coming to his house. He said that if he were present at the time of the *fakir*'s arrival, he would have given as *dakshina* of Rs.10/- and not merely Re.1/-. He however wanted to try his luck and so went out and searched all over the locality but could not trace the *fakir*. He returned home, took his meal, and along with his friend Mr.Chitre, went out for a walk. But a little away from his house, he saw a *fakir* walking briskly towards him. Even while Kulkarni was wondering whether he was the same *fakir*, the latter approached him and asked for *dakshina*. Appasaheb gave him Re.1/- but, the *fakir* wanted more. Appasaheb gave him Re.2/- more, still the *fakir* was not satisfied. He borrowed Rs.3/- from his friend Chitre and gave them to the *fakir*. But he wanted more. Appasaheb then requested the *fakir* to come to his house to receive *dakshina* and, taking him home, gave him Rs.3/- The *fakir* again demanded more. Appasaheb said that he had only a currency note of Rs. 10/-. The *fakir* took it and returned all the nine rupees that he had received earlier. Satisfied with the dakshina of Rs.10/- the *fakir* went away. And precisely that was the amount that Appasaheb said he would have given if he was present when Baba came to his house earlier! The *fakir* did not take a rupee less or a rupee more! Further, owing to the *fakir*'s silent demands for more, the Kulkarni could get Rs.9/- consecrated by Baba's touch. They kept the same in their shrine for worship. Later, when Kulkarni examined the packet of *udi* that the *fakir* had given his wife on his first visit, he found it miraculously transformed into *akshatas* (rice made yellow with turmeric, used in worship) and petals of flowers.

Raghuvir Purandhare of Badra records his experience of Baba's physical appearance before him, away from Shirdi. "My wife got an attack of cholera and the doctor gave her up as hopeless, Then I saw Baba standing by the side or *Dattamandir*, in front of my Dadar house and he ordered me to give the *udi* and *tirtha* (holy water) and so I gave her the same. Half an hour later she recovered sufficient warmth of body and the doctor felt hopeful of her recovery and she recovered.

Mahalsapathy, one of the closest of Baba's devotees went on a pilgrimage to Jejuri along with a *palki* (or palanquin) and a few companions. There they learned that there was an outbreak of plague and they were very much dejected. Mahalsapathy stood there dumb and sad leaning against this *palki*. Suddenly he had a feeling that somebody was standing behind him and turned round. Sai Baba stood there and he at once disappeared. Mahalsapathy remembered that Sai Baba was always with him in spirit. They were emboldened to stay on at Jejuri for four complete days and all of them returned to Shirdi safe. When Mahalsapathy went to *Dwarakamai*, Sai Baba smiled and said, "Bhagat, you had a fine pilgrimage. When you stood leaning against the *palki* I came there."

C.K. Rege of Indore was once laid up with an attack of sciatica at his father-in-law's house at Giggaon. His father-in-law who was a devotee of Sai Baba gave him Baba's *udi* and *teertha*. At about 2 p.m. a *sannyasi* wearing *kashaya* stood by Rege's cot and woke him up by tapping on his shoulder and said, "Child, do not fear. You will be alright in three days!" Rege was frightened by the sudden appearance of a stranger and so he shouted. But by the time his father-in-law turned

up, the strange visitor had disappeared. The later was sure that it was none other than Sai Baba who had come to bless his son-in-law. Rege was alright precisely on the third day!

One day in 1911, Balwant Khojokar of Thana took leave of Baba. When he had walked a considerable distance from *Dwrakamai* it occurred to him that that might be his last darshan of Baba and he felt a strong desire to see him once more. But once devotees took Baba's permission to return home, they should not return to him. Just as these ideas passed Khojokar's mind he glanced at the Lendi and there, peeping through the hedge, was the face of Baba! Baba said, "Are you going? Well, go!"

Mrs. Chadrabai was an ardent devotee of Sai Baba. She visited Shirdi now and then but her husband Borkar never did. But as he was his devotee's husband, Baba showered his grace on him too. In 1909 when Borkar was engaged in a road construction at Pandharpur, Chandrabai visited Shirdi and stayed there for some days. One day Sai Baba said to her, "You had better go to Pandharpur at once, and I will go with you. I need no conveyance to travel".

When she reached Pandharpur she was shocked to learn that her husband had left his work and went away to Bombay. She had only a little money in her purse and she had two companions with her. She just managed to go up to Kurdwadi and there she sat in the railway station, brooding gloomily about her helpless state. Suddenly a *fakir* appeared before her and asked her why she was gloomy. She gave an evasive reply but was surprised when he told her that her husband was at Dhond and that she should at once go there. But Chandrabai had not the needed fare. Then the *fakir* at once handed her three tickets to Dhond and went away before she could ask him anything. She then proceeded to Dhond.

Meanwhile, Bokar who was at the Dhond railway Station drank a little tea and was dozing on a bench. He had a reverie or a dream in which a *fakir* appeared before him and said, "Why do you neglect my mother? She is coming here by the next train, and is in carriage number so-and-so" and he mentioned even the number of the carriage. Borkar got up wondering who that *fakir* could be. The train arrived and Chandrabai stepped down from the railway carriage of the same number as was mentioned by the visionary *fakir*. Bokar received her and told her of his strange experience and asked her to show him the picture of Sai Baba. It was the same *fakir* that had appeared to him! Did not Sai Baba assure Chandrabai that he would go with her and that he needed no conveyance?

Sai Baba often manifested himself before his devotee in some other form. In such cases Baba always confirmed it to the devotee.

We have noted earlier how Sai Baba appeared before Rege in the form of a *Sannyasi* and that Rege's father-in-law was Baba's devotee. In 1914 Rege's third daughter was to be married and an invitation was sent to Baba. Baba sent his reply, "I will come in person and attened the marriage." As the marriage ceremony was in progress, the postman delivered a letter from Baba along with a packet of *udi*. The *udi* was to be applied to the foreheads of the bride and bridegroom. Just about the same time, a *fakir* came and asked Rege's father-in-law for a *dakshina* of one paisa. As he was busy with the ceremony he did not pay attention to the strange visitor. Later it occurred to him that the *fakir* was Baba himself. Then Rege said that if indeed the

visitor was Sai Baba himself, he should confirm their faith in him through a sign, that is, by appearing again. Next day the same *fakir* turned up and asked for *dakshina* of one paisa only. Rege gave it gladly. The *fakir* however, declined their invitation to dinner.

B.V. Deo, a *mamlatdar* at Dahnu, was an ardent devotee of Sai Baba. Once his mother completed the observance of thirty religious vows and had to feed nearly two hundred brahmins. Deo fixed up a date for the feeding and wrote a letter to Jog at Shirdi to request Baba on his behalf to attend the feast. When Baba heard Jog's reading of Deo's letter he said, "I always remember him who always remembers me and I fulfill his pious wishes. I need no conveyance. Write to Deo that three of us-You, I and someone else-would attend it", Jog conveyed the reply to Deo. Deo knew that Baba never left Shirdi physically and yet was happy to receive such a reply.

A few days earlier, a Bengali *sannyasi* arrived Dahanu to collect funds for cow-protection. Deo told him that as collections were just then being made from the public for some other cause, it would be better for him to come to Dahanu one or two months later. And the *sannyasi* went away. But he arrived at Deo's house at 10 a.m. on the day of the feast, hardly a month after his earlier visit! Deo thought that he came to collect funds. The *sannyasi* then told Deo that he came for lunch and not for funds. Deo heartily invited him for the feast. "There are two others with me", the *sannyasi* said and assured him that they would turn up in time by themselves and that no messenger need be sent for them. Precisely at 12 noon, the three guests arrived, enjoyed the feast and left.

After the ceremony Deo wrote a letter to Shirdi stating that the feast went on well but for Baba's breach of his promise. But even before Jog had opened the letter at Shirdi, Baba said, "Ah, Deo says that I broke my promise. I did attend the dinner with two others! I even tried to help him to recognize me by saying that we, the guests were three, that we came not for funds but for lunch. I never fail to keep my promise. If he can not recognize me why should he invite me at all?"

Jog was mystified at Baba's words and he promptly conveyed Baba's words to Deo. His mother was over-joyed that the culmination of her vows should be so graced by Baba.

One day, a devotee named Joshi took leave of Baba and asked him for *udi*. Baba told him that he would get it later. When Joshi was traveling by train, a fellow passenger gave him *udi* saying that it was sent for him by Sai Baba!.

In 1909 the elder brother of Balwant Nachne was undergoing a throat operation in Bajikar's Hospital in Bombay. Naturally the whole family was anxious about it at Dahanu. At noon a *sadhu* approached their house for food. They received him with due respect and fed him well but did not serve him one dish of lady's finger called 'bendi baji' as it was considered too poor a stuff for such a revered guest. But he specially asked for it and it was served. Then he blessed the family saying that the operation was completed at the hospital quite successfully and went away. Haribhau, a friend of Nachne, expressed the hope that by Sai Baba's grace it might be so. That was the first time that Nachne ever heard of Sai Baba.

In the evening Nachne's father returned from the hospital and told the family that the operation was completed successfully and that soon after, a *sadhu* approached the patient and passing his hands over the operated portion, said that all would be well and went away. Later, the same year, Nachne's father heard of Sai Baba's greatness from a *kirtan* (devotional singing) of Das Ganu and the family soon started worshipping Baba's picture.

In 1912 Nachne visited Shirdi with two of his friends. On the way the station Master at Koperagaon said that Baba was just a magician whom even educated people were not ashamed to idolise. Though Nachne's mind was much unsettled by the talk, they just arrived at Shirdi. Sai Baba who just then returned from the Lendi looked at Nachne and said, "What! Have you come away without taking leave from the *mamlatdar*? Never do like this!" This proof of Baba's omniscience completely tore the station Master's version to pieces. Their three days' stay at Shirdi confirmed their faith in Baba.

One day Sai Baba said to the other devotees "I had been to this man's house for a meal. He did not give me "bendi baji". Nachne's mind ran back to the incident of 1909 and realized that Sai Baba had graced his house already in the form of that *sadhu*, even before the family ever heard of him! What surprised Nachne more was that Sai Baba did not at all resemble the *sadhu* whom he had observed quite closely three or four times at Dahanu.

Adam Dalali of Bandra says regarding Baba's visits to him in different forms; "He has come to me in other forms and dealt with me. For instance: Once he came to me as a Brahmin and begged for something. I gave him two *annas* then. Once he came to me as a *marwari* and said he was hungry. I gave him four *annas* and asked him to go to *marwari* hotel for his meal. Later when I went to Shirdi, Baba dropped significant hints showing me that he had visited me in those forms. For instance, on the latter occasion he said of me to someone else, 'I went to this man; he told me to eat at the *marwari* hotel!'

What we have to note is that in assuming such forms how ungrudgingly and uncomplainingly he was pleased to be so treated by his devotees! Were they not the same devotees that would offer lavish gifts to him at Shirdi and spend lots of money on their trips to that place, just to get his blessing? The God-man of infinite mercy has proved his statements literally true-such statements as, for instance. "I get angry with none. Will a mother get angry with her kiddies? Will the ocean send back the waters to the several rivers? I love devotion. I am the slave of my devotee."

When Anna Chinchinikar first visited Shirdi, he stayed there for some days. During that period there was a sudden outbreak of plague at Chinchini. All his relations left that place in haste, leaving his wife alone. She was terribly frightened. During that period Baba appeared before her physically, twelve times, till at last the epidemic subsided. Baba protects not only his devotees but even their near and dear.

One Mr. Keshavrao Pradhan stayed at Ukrool near Bombay. Though he had heard of Sai Baba he did not believe in Him. He did not visit Baba till his friend compelled him to do so in 1916. Later he was quite changed. He repeatedly visited Shirdi and invited Baba to Ukrool. Baba simply gave him a picture of himself and said, "Go to your place and raise a temple of this (i.e., his form which you call Baba). Don't come here again. Go!" When Pradhan again visited him, Baba said,

"When I have come to your place, why are you here? Your place is your Shirdi now!" Pradhan submitted that he had not the confirmatory experience of this fact.

Later Pradhan raised a *mandir* at Ukrool and installed an idol of Baba in it. Ever since Baba spoke the above words, those who lived nearby the *Sai mandir*, including Pradhan and his family, had strange experiences. At night they used to hear the sound of the *mandir*-doors being opened, saw from a distance, Baba's physical form moving in the precincts of the shrine. Finally they saw him withdrawing into the *mandir* at about 3 a.m., and closing the doors of the mandir. Several *leelas* of Baba took place there and the number of devotees visiting the shrine rapidly increased. Even after Baba's *mahasamadhi* the devotees had clear proof of his spiritual presence there.

For instance, in 1940 the temple was being renovated after Pradhan's demise. But the funds were not forthcoming. A devotee named Narayan Purohit undertook *parayana* of 'Sri Sai Satcharitra' to secure Baba's help in the matter. In three or four days Baba appeared in his dream, moving about in the precincts of the temple saying, "Where is my *dhuni*? If there is no *dhuni*, how can this be Shirdi? How can the temple be complete?" Then he threw stones at all, fuming and fretting. Accordingly, with the consent of the trustee a *dhuni* (8' X 4') was made. Sri A.R. Walewalkar, son of Dabholkar (the first biographer of Baba) lit up the Dhuni in 7-4-1949 at 10 a.m. He stayed at Bhivapuri (which is close to Ukrool) under the instructions of Baba in a dream.

In February 1918, one Bapuji Sastri had brought Ganges water and did *abhishek* to Baba's feet and then sought his permission to go to Sajjangad for *Dasnavami*. Baba said, "I am here, and I am there also". Later Bapuji went to Sajjangad. At 5 a.m. on the day of holy *Dasnavami* Baba physically appeared before Bapuji. Baba is present everywhere!

The Guru Is All Gods

The spiritual perfection of a *sadguru* consists in realizing his essential identity with the One spirit of all existence which is god. All the gods of the Hindu pantheon are its different aspects. Thus the perfect Master is one who can demonstrate that he is all the gods, as Sai Baba did.

Lord Vithal

The father of Bhagwantrao worshipped Vithal regularly with great devotion. But after his death, his son Bhagavantrao neglected the worship and the annual pilgrimages to Pandharpur. When Bhagwantrao came to Shirdi, Sai Baba said to the other devotees, pointing at him, "His father was my friend, so I drew him here. This fellow never offered *naivedya* (i.e. offering of food to the Lord) and so he starved Vithal and Me; I have drawn him to this place so that I could remonstrate him and set him to carry on the worship regularly." Bhagwantrao marvelled at Baba's words and his faith was revived.

Raghuvir Purandhare too had such an experience. About the year 1913 his mother was asking him repeatedly to take her to Pandharpur even when they were at Shirdi. Even before Purandhare broached the subject of going to Pandharpur with him, Sai Baba himself mentioned it by asking

her when she proposed to "start for Pandhari". The same day, Purandhare and his mother got darshan of Baba as Vithal and Rukmabai in the *musjid* itself! They were naturally, highly pleased with the experience and did not wish to go to "Pandhari" any longer. Afterwards, Baba often asked Purandhare's mother, in a jocular manner, when she proposed to go to Pandharpur and she always replied that her chosen deity was at Shirdi and so Shirdi was her Pandharpur.

Sri Rama

A *mamlatdar*, who was a devotee of Sai Baba invited his friend, a doctor to accompany him to Shirdi. The doctor was a devotee of Sri Rama and was unwilling to see Sai Baba who, he thought was a moslem. He was afraid that he might be obliged to bow to Sai if he went to Shirdi. The *mamlatdar* then assured him that no one would force him to bow to Baba. So he came to Shirdi.

When they arrived at the mosque suddenly the doctor rushed to Baba and fell at his feet! The *mamlatdar* was surprised and later asked him why he gave up his earlier resolve. The doctor replied, "Sai Baba is not a moslem. He is a perfect *yogi*, an *avatar* of Rama". Three days later Baba graced him with the experience of supreme bliss which lasted for a fortnight.

In 1916 a Madrasi *bhajan mela* of the Kabirpanth consisting of a man, his wife, his sister-in-law and daughter, started on a pilgrimage to Banaras. On the way they heard of Baba's greatness and his generosity in rewarding devotional singers and so they visited Shirdi. They sang several songs melodiously at the Dwarakamai but except for the man's wife who was very devoted to her chosen diety Sri Rama, all of them were singing with their hearts set on Baba's gifts of money. Baba was pleased by the woman's devotion and at the noon *arti*, graced her with the *darshan* of Sri Rama in his own person. She was lost in the surge of spiritual bliss; her eyes overflowed with tears of ecstasy as she clapped her hands in utter joy; while everyone saw Sai Baba in the mosque she saw Sri Rama Himself in his place!

Lord Dattatreya

To the devotees of Lord Dattatreya, Sai Baba was Datta. Once two visitors came from Goa for Baba's *darshan*. Baba asked one of them for Rs. 15/- as *dakshina* and the man gave it. The other man volunteered to offer Rs. 35/- but Baba did not accept it. Later Shama made bold to ask him why he made such distinction between the two visitors. Baba said, "Shama, you do not know anything. I do not take anything from anyone. *Musjidimai* (i.e. mother *musjid*) calls for her debt and the debtor pays it and becomes free. Have I any home, property or family to care for, that I should need money? I require nothing. At first the man was poor and could not secure any job. He then took a vow that if he got a job he would offer his first month's pay to Lord Datta. He soon got a job and his first month's pay was Rs. 15/- Later he was promoted and his pay rose up to Rs.790/- p.m. But in his prosperity he cleanly forgot all about his vow. Debt, enmity and murder have got to be atoned for. The force of his *karma* has driven him here and I asked for the amount from him as *dakshina*". The visitor in question confirmed that Baba's words were nothing but the truth. By revealing his knowledge of his vow and the circumstances in which it was made and also demanding it Baba showed that he was Lord Datta.

Balwant Khojokar was at Shirdi in 1911 on the occasion of holy *Datta Jayanthi* i.e., the day of Lord Dattatreya's first manifestation as the son of Sage Atri and his wife Anasuya. Khojokar's son writes about the incident that took place on that day; "At about 5 p.m. or so, Baba was seated at the mosque with devotees around him. Suddenly he said, 'I am having the pangs of labour. I cannot bear it. I am about to be delivered!' Evidently he was identifying himself with Anasuya of yore, mother of Lord Dattatreya, who at that time of the day had her pains of labour ages ago and so he too was undergoing sympathetic pain. At the time of sunset, he drove out all people from the mosque and again, after a little while, he called in all people to come to him. Then he was in glee. This, according to *puranas*, was the time of Datta's birth. People went in, and among them was my father. What he saw on Baba's seat and in the place of Baba was small child, charming three-faced figure of Datta as an infant. That vision lasted for a moment. Khojokar realized that Sai Baba was Datta."

Another devotee's experience occurred long after Baba's *mahasamadhi* (in 1918). Vinayak Daji Bhave, a clerk in the Railway Department, was anxious to find a *guru*. So he undertook a devout daily reading of the "*Guru gita*" which is said to be efficacious in such matters. After a month, he visited a temple of Datta on a Thursday. But, to his wonder, there he saw a *samadhi* (i.e. tomb of a saint) in the place of the usual idol of Datta! Next morning he happened to see, for the first time, late Sri Dabholkar's (Hemadpanth) book on Sai Baba in which he saw a picture of Sai Baba's *samadhi*. At once he recognised it to be the one that he saw at the Datta temple earlier and inferred that Sai Baba was his *guru*. For a time he took Baba's *udi* and read books on Baba. After some time the doubt cropped up in his mind that a tomb cannot be a substitute to a living *guru* who could communicate with him. So again he did *parayana* of the *Guru gita* for a week. Then the great saint Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaobet appeared in his dream. Inferring that Narayana Maharaj was his *guru*, he went to Khedgaonbet. There Sri Narayan Maharaj appeared in his dream and said, "I and Sai Baba are not different from each other. Why do you not go there?" Thus confirmed, Daji Bhave accepted Sai Baba as his *guru*. Later a *sadhu* read his palm and said, "Sai Baba is your *guru*". The appearance of Sai Baba's *samadhi* in the place of Lord Datta's idol in the Datta temple and its confirmation by Narayana Maharaj establish Baba's identity with Lord Dattatreya beyond any doubt.

About 1900, one Balasaheb Binnevala, a close relation of Nanasaheb Chandorkar, went to see Sai Baba, but only to oblige Nanasaheb. He was a worshipper of Lord Datta. When he went and saw Sai Baba, the latter appeared to him as having the three heads of Lord Data. Balasaheb was at once convinced that Sai Baba was Datta.

Maruthi

Somanath Deshpande, the son of Nanasaheb Nimonkar had the fortune of serving Baba for four days when his father had to remain at Ahmednagar to attend the court. Within that short period Somanath had a blessed vision. Baba was seated in his usual place and Shama was sitting on the steps of the mosque. Suddenly Baba appeared to Somanath in the form of Maruthi. "There was no longer Sri Baba's usual figure. There was the Maruthi body. Only I did not see if he had a tail. Seeing that form I at once said to Madhav Rao (i.e.,Shama), "Take his *darshan*; see, he is Maruthi!", so writes Somanath.

Lord Satyanarayana

M.V. Sahasra Buddhe of Satara learnt of Baba only after the later's *mahasamadhi*, in about 1931 and had several divine experiences. The crowning experience was, in his own words, as follows: When I was at Paltan, I had a vision one night of a *Satyanaarayana* image (i.e., an idol) and a pandal put up (above it) and worshipped in the Shirdi *samadhi* front hall. The offerings made to the image were passing straight into the tomb to Sai Baba seated within the tomb. The tomb was transparent. To verify the truth of this, I wrote at once to Shirdi to see if *Satyanarayana puja* was conducted at the time and place mentioned above. I got a reply in the affirmative. Baba has thus shown me that he is *Satyanarayana* and that *puja* to *Satyanaayana* is *puja* to Sai Baba".

Ganapathi

A housewife was suffering from severe and chronic headache. All medical aid proved futile. At last she resorted to Baba. As soon as she bowed to him and sat in his presence her ailment vanished quite mysteriously. When she told Sai Baba about it, he said, "Mother, you have been feeding me sumptuously. I have been watching you since you were a girl." The lady was surprised and said, "Baba I am blessed with your *darshan* just now, how could I have fed you sumptuously?" Sai smiled most benignly and said, "Whom do you worship at your home?" She said that she had been a devotee of Lord Ganapathi and that she worships Him every day. "At your mother's place?" Baba asked. "There too I used to offer flowers, fruits and sweetmeats to the same deity," she replied. Sai said, "All those offerings of your have reached me. That's how I have known you since your younger days." Mythologically, Ganapathi is a deity who is fond of sumptuous food and Baba had identified himself with him. This miracle demonstrated that hearty offerings and worship rendered even to an 'inanimate idol' in a true spirit of devotion and faith are sure to reach the Spirit which prevails all Saints, animals and even idols. It is the spirit behind the worship that is of prime importance. Hence Baba did not condemn idol worship. It is a valid form of spiritual practice for those who are by nature made for it.

Lord Narasimhaswami

Sadasiva Joshi of Sholapur accompanied his friend Gadgil to Shirdi. There he used to attend the daily *arti* to Baba's picture in Sathe's *wada*. On three days in succession Sadasiv had *darshan* of Lord Narasimha in Sai's picture. Later when he took leave of Baba to return home, the later gave him *udi* and sweetmeat as prasad to be taken home. Sadasiv found that the *prasad* was too small in quantity to be distributed to all the members of his family. Baba then gave him eight *annas* (i.e., fifty paise) and told him to purchase more sweetmeats from any shop at Shirdi and that it was indeed his *prasad*. This experience of Sadasiv demonstrates that Sai Baba is not different from Lord Narasimha. Besides, it shows that by the blessed presence of the godman, the whole of the village got so sanctified that sweetmeat purchased from any shop there is equivalent to *prasad* given by him. Baba offering the needed money is a tacit way of acknowledging that the mystic vision which Sadasiv had was specifically granted by Him.

Khandoba

Once Sri Marthand, the son of Mahalsapathy, was seated at the threshold of Khandoba's temple. Baba came there and Marthand reverentially stood up. But quite astonishingly, even before his very eyes, Baba appeared smiling and walked towards the idol of Khandoba and merged in it. In amazement Marthand peeped behind the idol but there was none there. While he looked on in panic Baba again walked out of the idol and left the temple, smiling at him. Henceforth, Marthand took it that Baba wanted him to worship the idol as Baba's form and so he did till the last.

Sai Baba is in all Saints and Sadhus

St. Simeon writes in the *Philokalia*, "The Saints…are linked together and united by the Holy Spirit… A man who does not express the desire to link himself to the latest of the saints (in time) in all love and humility, owing to a certain distrust of him, will never be linked with the preceding saints and will not be admitted to their succession, eventhough he thinks that he possesses all possible faith and love for God and for all his saints".

Thus the account of Sai Baba's life affords us a close view of this aspect of the lives of god men like Jesus Christ. Christ for instance, gave his followers a vision of Elija and Moses in himself.

Sai Baba and Narasinga Maharaj

Narasinga Maharaj was a great saint of Nasik and was a contemporary of Sai Baba. The two saints, like all great saints, experienced an inner at-one-ment and acted in unison. One was constantly aware of what the other was doing though they were separated by a considerable physical distance.

Hansraj of Sakori was a devote of both the saints. He was suffering from asthma and he also had no issue even years after his marriage. When he approached Narasinga Maharaj for blessing the latter told Hansaraj that his body was obsessed by a spirit which was preventing the birth of children. Narasinga Maharaj advised him to go to Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi who would give him two slaps and hereby exorcise the spirit. Accordingly Mrs. And Mr. Hansaraj visited Sai Baba in 1916. When they bowed to Sai Baba in the mosque, Baba slapped Hansaraj twice and said "Evil spirit get away!" Later the pair was blessed with offspring!

In 1917 Haribhau Karnik of Dahanu visited Sai Baba on the holy *Guru Purnima* day and worshipped him in the morning. In the afternoon he took leave of Sai Baba and was getting down the steps of the mosque when he had a sudden impulse to offer Re.1/- as *dakshina* to Sai Baba. When he was about to turn round, Shama told him that none should see Baba again, once leave was taken of him. So Karnik started home. On the way he visited the temple of Kalarama at Nasik. Sri Narasinga Maharaj who was seated with a number of his devotees near the gate in the temple suddenly stepped towards Haribhau and, holding him by his hand said, "Give me my one rupee!" Karnik was at first surprise but he paid the rupee most willingly. At once it flashed in his

mind that through Narasinga Maharaj, Sai Baba himself received Re.1/- which he wished to offer.

Moulvisaheb

Ruttonji Shapurji Wadia was a wealthy mill owner of Nanded. He had no issue. Ganu, a local devotee of Sai Baba advised him to seek Sai Baba's blessings. Shortly after, Ruttonji visited Sai Baba with gifts and, after bowing to his feet, expressed his wish. Sai Baba at once asked him for *dakshina* of Rs.5/-. When Ruttonji took out the amount readily, Sai Baba said that as he had already received Rs.3-14-0, he needed only the balance of Rs.1-2-0 to Baba. Ruttonji gave Rs.1-2-0 to Baba. Baba blessed him saying that *Allah* would satisfy his heart's desire.

Ruttonji returned to Nanded with joy but he could not at all understand how Sai Baba could ever have received Rs. 3-14-0 from him earlier, for his visit to Shirdi was the first ever. He asked Das Ganu for clarification. Das Ganu thought about it a while and remembered that one day Ruttonji offered his hospitality to a *moulvi*. When Das Ganu said that Sai Baba received Rs. 3-14-0 through the *moulvi*, Ruttonji calculated the value of the things offered to her latter and it amounted precisely to Rs.3-14-0! In course of time, Ruttonji had as many as twelve issues of which four survived.

Akkalkot Maharaj

The Swami of Akkalkot, one of the greatest saints of India is considered as the incarnation of Lord Dattatreya. He granted the highest spiritual experience to many of his visitors and made them very great saints.[1] He lived at Akkalkot (Maharastra) from 1856 to 1878. When he was about to attain *mahasmadhi* in 1878, one of his devotees, Keshav Naik of Tardev said to him, with tears in his eyes, "Maharaj, if you go away, what support have we?" The Maharaj gave him *padukas* to Keshav Naik to be worshipped as his representatives and said, "My manifestation will be at Shirdi in Ahmednagar district. Go there always. Be devoted to him. If you do so, you will not suffer my absence. And you will be happy."

When Akkalakot Maharaj passed away, Keshav Naik and his son Ramachandra Naik, accompanied by two orthodox brahmins, went to Shirdi. On the way the brahmins spoke ill of Sai Baba, calling him a moslem and a mad *fakir* and said that a brahmin should not bow to him. When they all arrived at the mosque at Shirdi, Sai Baba said to Keshav Naik, "You and your son may come and visit me if you like. The two others are *karmatha brahmins* (zealots.)"

Then Sai Baba asked Keshav Naik to fetch some margosa leaves and distributed the same to all the four and asked them to tell him how they tasted. The two brahmins found the leaves unusually bitter and the Naiks found them sweet! Thus Baba separated the grains from the chaff and confirmed the statement of the late Akkalkot Maharaj to the Naiks that he was the manifestation of their former *guru*.

Harischandra Pitale of Bombay had a son who suffered from epileptic fits. On the advice of his friends he took the boy to Shirdi and by Sai Baba's grace the boy was gradually cured. After spending some days in Baba's blessed presence, the Pitale family sought his permission to return

home. Then Baba called Pitale near and said "Bapu, I have given you Rs. 2/- earlier. Now I give you Rs. 3/- Keep these also in your shrine and worship them. You will be much benefited." Pitale received the gift, and returned home.

The Pitales considered themselves blessed by their visit to Shirdi but could not understand how Baba could have given them Rs. 2/- earlier; for that was their first visit ever to Shirdi! Pitale's mother, after cool reflection said, "Just as you have visited Sai Baba with your wife and son, so did your father visit the great Maharaj of Akkalkot when you were a small child. That Swami blessed your father and gave Rs. 2/- and told him to keep them in his worship. Your father worshipped them carefully till his death. Thereafter the worship was neglected and the two rupees could not be found. Now it is clear that the same Maharaj has manifested himself in the form of Sai Baba and gave you the clue to recognize him as such and blessed you with Rs. 3/- more." Harischandra Pitale's joy knew no bounds. He realized that saints not only bless their devotees but care for their children also.

A devotee by name Bhai Krishnaji Alibagkar worshipped the photograph of Akkalkot Maharaj. Once when he was planning to go to Akkalkot, the Swami of Akkalkot appeared in his dream at night and said, "Now I am at Shirdi. Go there." So Bhai went to Shirdi and worshipped Baba and stayed there for six months. As a memento of his dream-vision, he prepared stone padukas and installed them under the neem tree (under which Sai Baba sat before he resorted to the *musjid*) in 1912 . Upassani Maharaj who was Sai Baba's devotee was at Shirdi at that time and he wrote a beautiful verse in Sanskrit on Sai Baba which is inscribed on the pedestal of the *padukas*. The *padukas* can be seen even today.

At the end of his stay at Shirdi, Bhai once again longed to visit Akkalkot. When he sought Sai Baba's permission he said, "What is there at Akkalkot? That Maharaj is here now in my form! Why go there now?"

Once Sai Baba gave jog the *darshan* of Akkalkot Swami in himself.

Sridhar Narayan Kharkar of Thana was given a picture of Baba and his *udi* when he was ill and the next day he recovered! Faith thus struck root in his heart. But a doubt arose in his mind whether he could keep a Moslem saint's (i.e. Baba's) photograph by the side of the picture of Akkalkot Maharaj. That night he had a dream in which a fakir, robed like Sai Baba, came towards the *verandah* where he (Kharkar) and his friend were sitting. Kharkar stood up to welcome the *fakir*. Then his companion said to him, "This *fakir* (Sai Baba) is not different from the Swami of Akkalkot" and told him to treat both the saints with equal regard. The next morning Kharkar kept both the photographs together in the shrine and worshipped them.

Guru Gholap Maharaj

Moolay Sastri was an orthodox brahmin, well versed in astrology and *sastras*. Once he came to Shirdi to see the millionaire of Nagpur, Bapusaheb Buty, who was a great devotee of Sai Baba. After meeting Buty, Moolay Sastri and others went to the *musjid* to see Sai Baba. Baba bought fruits with his own money and distributed the same to all the devotees. Moolay Sastri requested Baba to permit him to read his (Baba's) palm. But Baba ignored his request and gave him four

bananas.

All the devotees later returned to the *wada*. Moolay Sastri took his bath and started his daily devotions like *agnihotra* (keeping the sacred fire) etc.

Baba started on his stroll to Lendi and said to those at the mosque, "Get some saffron dye (*gerua*); today we shall put on ochre robes!" No one understood the real significance of Baba's words. For Baba never wore a saffron robe.

At noon Baba sat on his *gaddi* and the *arti* commenced. Then he said to Buty, "Go and get some *dakshina* from that brahmin of Nasik". Buty conveyed Baba's demand for *dakshina* to Moolay Sastri and he was puzzled. For he was a pious brahmin while Baba was a moslem and he was not, after all, Baba's disciple! Why should he offer *dakshina* to him? But he could not refuse to give it either. For Baba was a great saint and Buty, his friend and millionaire. So reluctantly he left off his daily observances and at once proceeded to the *musjid*.

When they reached *Dwarakamai*, Moolay Sastri remained a little away from it; for it was a mosque; and he was pure after his bath and worship. From there he threw flowers at Baba and joined his hands in salutation. And lo, in the musjid it was not Sai Baba that was seated. He saw his late Guru Gholap Swami there! He was speechless for a few moments with wonder and joy. He at once ran into the mosque and fell at his *guru's* feet. While the whole congregation was chanting the *arti* of Sai Baba, he was ecstatically calling out his *guru's* name. Standing there with folded hands, he closed his eyes in bliss. When he again opened his eyes, he saw not his *guru* but Sai Baba asking him for *dakshina!* Seeing Baba's real nature, Moolay Sastri completely forgot his pride of caste and learning. With tears of joy in his eyes, he gladly offered his *dakshina*. It was only then that the devotees understood the real significance of Baba's earlier statement, "Today we shall put on the saffron colored robes". Baba obviously meant that he was going to demonstrate his identity with an ochre-robed *guru*. Sai Baba was one with all *Gurus*!
For we have already noted in the chapter "Call of the Guru" that Sai Baba identified himself with the *sadhu* of Tapovan whom Govind Upasani Sastry had met before visiting Shirdi.

Guru Raghunath Maharaj

One Dr. Pandit came along with Dadabhat to the mosque. Usually, except Mahalsapathy no one else was permitted by Baba to apply sandal plate to his body. Even Mahalsapathy applied it to Baba's throat only. But on this occasion, when Dadabhat was worshipping Baba, Dr. Pandit took sandal paste from the plate with his fingers and applied it to Baba's forehead in the form of the *tripundra*. Everyone thought that Baba would flare up in rage; but to the surprise of all he meekly allowed Dr. Pandit to do what no one else was allowed to do, Baba said, "In me he was visualizing his own *guru* Raghunath Maharaj and was worshipping him through me as was his wont. How, then, could I object to it?" On enquiry Dr. Pandit confirmed Baba's statement and was himself thrilled with joy to know that Baba was aware of his attitude.

Other Sadhus

In 1908, during the holy *chaturmasya* (rainy four-month period) Mrs. Chandrabai Borkar was at Kopergaon. Once, a *fakir* asked her for garlic *chutney* and *roti*. She said that she does not prepare it during the holy months and the *fakir* left. Later, when she visited Shirdi, Sai said, "You've not given me garlic *chutney* and *roti*. Why have you come here?" She replied, "I've come to offer it" Baba then said to the others, "She has been my sister for the last seven births!"

Sri Manik Prabhu

Sai affirmed his identity with saints of yore. One day, he said that he was once forced by six moslems to partake of mutton. He protested that as a brahmin, he was forbidden from eating it, but they did not relent. Then he covered the mutton with a cloth and prayed to God. At once it was transformed into roses, each as big as the palm of one's hand. Evidently, Sai was identifying himself with the great saint Sri Manik Prabhu, the third incarnation of Lord Datta, in whose biography is found this incident.

A Great Moslem Saint of Emperor Humayun's time

Mr. Kolhatkar reports a very interesting fact in his book on Sai Baba.

One day Sai said, "Long ago, I worked, ate and slept in the house of a good brahmin at Paithan. Only Allah knows where he is. I was there even 1,000 years earlier! Once I lived happily at Prayag. I was old and used to smoke. One day, a brahmin with a *veena* in his hand, came to me and told me that a brahmin celebate named Mukunda was practicing austerities and said, "Tell him to be patient and that his *tapas* will soon bear fruit." When I went to his retreat, Mukund and his dispciples grew wild and said, "A moslem like you should not step in here. We'll immolate ourselves in protest and the sin will light on you!" "Do as you like, *Allah Malik!*" I said and left. At the market place, I saw a young royal couple, evidently in exile, with three attendants. They were begging for water to drink. I gave them water from my *kamandala*. The princess drank it and sought my blessing. I blessed them and said, "Go to Amarkota. You'll have a son who will become a king. I too shall go there!" So they left. After wandering little, I too reached there and learned of the birth of a son named Jalaluddin Mohammad to the prince. He is the famous Akbar." Obviously,Sai identified himself with a Moslem saint of the Mughal period. Mughal historian Billigrami's chronicle does contain facts corroborating Sai's story.

Sri Narasimha Saraswathi

One Sindhia had only daughters. In 1903, he visited Gangapur and vowed that if he were blessed with a son, he would take the child there for *darshan*. Within a year he had a son, but he neglected the vow. In 1911, when he visited Shirdi, Sai bawled out in a rage, "Are you proud of having a son? There was no male issue in your destiny. I tore a piece of my flesh and gave you one!" Sindhia realized that Sai was one with Sri Narasimha Saraswathi of Gangapur, the second avatar of Lord Dattatreya (1458 AD).

Sai demonstrated his essential one-ness with the great saints of later times. Sadasiv of Harda was very much dejected after Sai's *mahasamadhi* in 1918. One night Sai appeared in his dream and said, "Now I am at Saikheda. Come for darshan." At that time, saint Sri Dhunivala Dada was living there. Sadasiv went for his *darshan* and saw Sai seated in the place of Sri Dada. Henceforth, he looked upon the latter as the living form of Sai.

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1 See the 'The Supreme Master' by the author

Baba is all creatures and things

Baba's omnipresence was not confined to the three forms we have noted so far - all gods, all saints and all men. He was all the other creatures too!

Mrs. Tarkhad was at Shirdi. It was noon and she was serving lunch. A hungry dog turned up there and began to moan pitifully for food. Mrs. Tarkhad at once got up and threw it a *roti* which it ate with great relish. Later, in the afternoon, when she went to the mosque Baba said, "Mother, today you have fed me sumptuously and my senses and hunger were much appeased. Ever act like this and this will stand you in good stead. Sitting in this *musjid* I never speak untruth. Take pity on me; feed the hungry first and then eat yourself. Note this well." Mrs. Tarkhad said "Baba when did I feed you?" Baba said, "The dog which you fed at lunch hour is I. I roam in this world in different forms - cats, pigs, crows and all. He who sees me in all these creatures is dearest to me. Abandon the sense of difference and serve me as you did today."

One evening Mrs. Laxmibai entered the mosque and bowed to baba who said to her, "Laxmibai, I am very hungry". She ran home and fetched *roti* and vegetables for him. He at once took it up and gave it to a dog. Laxmibai felt shocked and insulted and said, "Was it for this that you wanted me to bring the food here". Baba was unperturbed. He said, "Why do you grieve over such a small affair? The appeasement of its hunger is the same as feeding me. The dog has a soul though it cannot communicate with us. Remember that whoever feeds the hungry feeds me."

Baba begged his food from five houses and he ate it in the *musjid*. Mrs. G.S. Khaparde who stayed at Shirdi for a number of days used to offer him food at the *musjid*. Once she invited Baba to her lodging for meal. This she did day after day, for some time. One day Baba promised her that he would go to her house. That day, when she was preparing various dishes, a dog came there. Mrs. Khaparde was afraid that it might pollute the pure dishes. Not finding anything handy with which to drive it out, she picked up a burning brand from the hearth and threw it at the dog and the creature ran away. That day too Baba did not turn up. So she took the food to the mosque. On seeing her Baba said, "When I came to your house you threw a burning brand at me!" Mrs. Khaparde caught his point and repented for her inadvertence.

Hansaraj stayed at Shirdi with his wife for a considerable time and was cured of his asthma by Baba's grace. Baba told Hansaraj that he should strictly avoid taking curd and sour and hot items of food. But Hansaraj was too fond of curds and privately told his wife that he would rather give up his soul than stop eating curds. So they prepared curds every day for two months but Baba

somehow prevented him from eating it. Everyday, when the couple went to attend the noon-*arti* at the mosque, a cat used to steal into their lodging; and eat up that curd. One day he was furious and decided to punish the cat. So he stayed away from the noon-*arti* and watched for it. He saw it coming and eating the curds and hit it with a stick. Crying in pain the creature ran away. In the afternoon, when everyone went to the mosque, Baba said, "There is an obstinate idiot amidst us who wants to die by eating sour and pungent things. But I would not allow him to do that. Today I went to him in the form of a cat. That fellow has given me a caning on my back. See here!" So saying, Baba exposed his back and Hansaraj noticed scars of severe caning! Hansaraj repented for his stupidity and thereafter gave up eating the things which Baba forbade. Baba had to prescribe the remedy to his patients and make them adhere to that and suffer at their hands.

Sainthood is no rosy privilege. How much such a one as Baba has to suffer from the violence that people commit on dumb creatures, receiving and experiencing, as they do, all the pain and misery, not for a day or two at some point in history but to the end of time? We shall, in a later chapter, note a few incidents to show that Baba was very much alive even after his *mahasamadhi* and that he did suffer for the sins of mankind and bless it in return. Christ had only brought this truth into the knowledge of mankind. But the ignorance of making seems to have been too great even for him. Men have conveniently packed him up in to a limited period in history and thought that he had once suffered for them and that he no longer does. The testiomony of all great saints and prophets like the Buddha and Vivekananda shows that they have to suffer till the last creature in creation is ultimately liberated from sin and ignorance. But men find it quite Christian to vilify, kill and hate one another, in the name of such holy ones by raising one Godman's name against that of another. Yet the holy ones hold on and continue to draw the ignorant mortals to the shore. What grace, compassion and tenacity are theirs!

Mrs. Hansraj says, "Sai Baba, while he was all along living at Shirdi itself, should suddenly declare, 'I am just back from Varanasi after a holy dip in Ganga. Why do I want a bath here' Or 'I have just now returned from Kolhapur and Audumbarwadi.' "

Baba's omnipresence extends even to things. Balabua Sutur of Bombay was a famous saint who by his melodious and ecstatic *bhajans*, earned the title of 'Modern Tukaram'. He came to Shirdi for the first time in 1917 and bowed before Sai Baba. Baba said to the others, "I know this man for the last four years". Balabua remembered that exactly four years earlier, he prostrated before Baba's photograph in Bombay. What an immense assurance for us today!

Babasaheb Tarkhad of Bandra was a *Prarthana Samajist*. His wife and son were ardent devotees of Baba. Once, during the May vacation, Master Tarkhad was asked to accompany his mother to Shirdi. But he was reluctant to go; because his daily worship of Baba's photograph at home would suffer and his father, being a *Prarthana Samajist*, may not care to worship it in his absence. Knowing his fears, Mr. Tarkhad solemnly promised him that he would conduct the daily worship on his behalf. After extracting an oath from his father, Mrs. and Master Tarkhad left for Shirdi on a Friday night. During the next three days Mr. Tarkhad performed the worship scrupulously. Everyday he offered sugar as *naivedya* to Baba's photograph and the same was distributed to all at lunch by the cook. On Tuesday he conducted the puja and rushed to his office as usual but in his hurry to attend the office in time, he forgot to offer *naivedya* to Baba's picture that day. Later Tarkhad was shocked at his grave lapse. After lunch, he wrote a letter to his son at

Shirdi confessing his lapse, praying for Baba's pardon and promising that he would not repeat the error.

The same day (i.e., Tuesday), at Shirdi, Sai Baba said to Mrs. Tarkhad, "Mother, I was very hungry. I had been to your house at Bandra hoping to find there something to eat. I found the door locked. Yet I managed to enter the room. But I found that Bhau (i.e., Mr. Tarkhad) had not kept anything for me to eat. So I have returned unappeased."

The lady could not understand his words. But Master Tarkhad at once realized that there was some error in his father's worship at Bandra. So he requested Baba to permit him to return to take care of the worship himself. Baba refused to give the necessary permission and asked him to perform the *puja* there itself.

After the noon-*arati*, Master Tarkhad promptly wrote a letter to his father at Bandra, conveying to him the words of Baba and requesting him to see that there were no lapses in the worship. The father's letter reached the son and the son's reached the father at the same time. Thus the literal identity of Baba with his picture was established. Who can raise his finger against image and idol worship?

On a full moon day in 1917, Sai Baba appeared to Hemadpanth in his dream as a well dressed *sannyasi*, woke him up and told him that he was going to be their guest that day. Strangely enough this act of Baba waking Hemadpanth was a part of the dream! Soon Hemadpanth woke up. He knew very well that Baba would not go to anyone's house for meal. Yet the dream had a compulsive force about it so that Hemadpanth could not but take it seriously. So he told his wife that Sai Baba would be their guest that day she wondered how Baba would come all the way to Bandra. Yet she made the necessary preparations.

After the noon worship lunch was being arranged. Hemadpanth was anxiously watching how Baba was going to turn up. When every thing was ready they heard the sound of footsteps on the stair-case. Hemadpanth immediately opened the door. There were two persons, moslems – Ali Mohammad and Moulana Ismu Mujavar. The visitors apologised to them for disturbing at the lunch hour and, handing him some packet, said "Please take this; we have brought it for you. We shall meet you later and recount the wonderful story behind it."

When the visitors went away, Hemadpanth found that it was a nice picture of Sai Baba. Lo! There came Sai Baba as his guest, punctually at the lunch hour! Hemadpanth's joy knew no bounds. With tears of joy in his eyes he placed the picture on the central seat reserved for the chief guest at lunch. After duly worshipping it and offering *naivedya*, the whole family finished their lunch. In the light of the experience of Balabua Sutar and the Tarkhad family, this event cannot be brushed aside as a mere coincidence.

Nine years later Ali Mohammed met Hemadpanth and related the story as follows:-

Ali Mohammed kept pictures of great saints like Tajuddin Baba, Moulanasaheb, Mohammed Hussein and Sai Baba in his house at Bandra and worshipped them. Once his brother-in-law, Nur Mohammed Peerbhoy presented copies of the photograph of his own *guru*, Saint Abdul Rahman to his friends and he gave one to Ali Mohammed. The latter kept the picture along with those of others at his house three months before Ali Mohammed's visit to Hemadpanth house, the former underwent an operation for abcess on his leg and was bed-ridden at Nur Mohammed's house in Bombay. About this time, Nur Mohammed someday presented a copy of the photograph of his *guru*, Saint Abdul Rahman to the *guru* himself. Abdul Rahman, being an orthodox Moslem, disapproved of image worship. So, he grew wild for worshipping his photograph and drove him out. Nur Mohammad was shocked to see that what he did was a piece of heresy. So he at once took back all the copies of the photographs which he had distributed among his friends and got them thrown into the sea through a fisherman at Bandra. He also pressed Ali Mohammad to follow suit. Ali Mohammed had got all the pictures in his house at Bandra thrown into the sea through his manager.

After two months Ali Mohammed returned to Bandra and was amazed to find in his house the picture of Sai Baba safely resting against the wall! For his manager was ordered to throw away all the pictures in the house. How did Sai Baba's photograph alone manage to be there? At once he kept it in his cupboard lest his brother-in-law might see it and throw it away. When he was thinking how to save it from destruction, it occurred to him – probably Baba had inspired the idea- that he should seek Moulana Ismu Mujavar's counsel. The latter suggested that the best thing would be to give it to Hemadpanth who, being a staunch devotee of Sai Baba, Would take proper care of it. So it was that picture that arrived at Hemadpanth house punctually on time for lunch and Sai Baba told him of his arrival in advance. A little thought as to why the other moslem saints allowed their pictures to be thrown away while Baba did not? The answer is simple. The other saints were chiefly moslems and as upholders of Islamic principles they did not want their pictures to be worshipped. But Sai Baba who identified himself with all religions, did not mind his picture being worshipped. As moslems, Ali Mohammed and Nur Mohammed were absolutely right in removing the pictures from their worship. It is no sin. For Baba wanted every one to follow his own path. And quite as legitimately, a Hindu devotee could worship the same and benefit equally by thus following his own religion. This explains Sai Baba's announcement to Hemadpanth that he was going to visit his house, and Baba's picture escaping the fate of all the other pictures.

The mission of the other saints mentioned above was to uplift Islam just as Shankara and Ramanuja were born to uplift Hinduism. Sai Baba's mission was different. His is the religion of tomorrow, if mankind has a future. If it has no future, Sai Baba's is the only possible way of ensuring it. Each has to follow his own path with the realization that other paths are equally valid to their followers. Sai Baba himself is the assurance to show that all of them are equally valid. Many were the orthodox moslems and Hindus that attained spiritual perfection under his guidance. None of the world's religions is bad or imperfect; their narrow, proselytizing attitudes, their intolerance and dogmatism are bad, bad not only to others but to themselves too. For, intolerance and rivalry are the life breath of politics of destruction; they are an expression of the

lingering beastly instincts of a stone age man. Devoid of these evils all religions are the very blue-prints of a future mankind of supermen. And Sai Baba, in the tradition of Kabir, is the surest guarantee of this truth which no one who has eyes encouraged everyone to follow his own way and helped everyone to get out of pitfalls which he encountered him. Returning to our main theme –

Kakasaheb Dixit once came to Shirdi to invite Sai Baba to his son's sacred-thread ceremony at Nagpur. Nanasheb Chandorkar too arrived there to invite Baba to his son's marriage at Gwalior. Sai Baba told both of them to take Shama with them as his representative and assured them that after visiting Banaras and Prayag he would be 'ahead of Shama'.

Then Shama started and, after attending the two functions at Nagpur and Gwalior, he visited the holy-places Banaras and Ayodhya. He spent twenty one days at Ayodhya and two months in Banaras. Then he went to Gaya and stayed in the house of a priest. When the Shirdi party arrived there, a big photograph of Baba was there, fixed in the central hall. Shama was overwhelmed by Baba's love and his eyes were brimmed with tears. He was told that, the priest visited Shirdi twelve years earlier. There at the house of Shama, he saw a big photograph of Sai Baba which he loved to possess. When shama asked Baba whether he should give the picture to the visitor, Baba told Shama to do so. And thus it came to Gaya, years ahead of Shama. And strangely enough Shama happened to stay at the same priest's house. And Baba knew of this far ahead. The devotee could realize the literal truth of Baba's assurance that he would be ahead of him. Till Shama saw the picture, neither he nor the priest remembered anything of their previous acquaintance with each other.

It is not as though Baba's picture is a living force only to those who were his staunch devotees. It is so even with others.

Kaka Maharaj of Dhopeswar was a famous saint. When he once visited Poona, he was surrounded by a crowd of his devotees; every one of them requested him to come to his house for dinner. Among them was Sai Baba's devotee, H.V. Sathe. The Maharaj told him that he could not oblige him. But by evening the great saint had himself sent word to Sathe that he would visit his house! Sathe who received the message to his office, at once returned to his house and made the necessary arrangements. When finally Kaka Maharaj visited his house, Sathe asked him why he changed his earlier resolve. Kaka Maharaj pointed to the photograph of Baba in the house and said, "He would not allow me to rest till I visited you!"

Baba's Omniscience

Baba once assured his devotees, "Whatever you do, wherever you may be, ever bear this in mind that I am always aware of everything". What a great solace and a source of confidence to his devotees, and yet what an effective check to their evil propensities!

In December 1915, one Balakram Mankar went to the Tarkhad's and told them that he was going to Shirdi and asked them whether they had any message for Baba. Mrs. Tarkhad wanted to send some gift to Baba. She searched the whole house but found nothing but a milk-cake (*peda*) which was already offered to Sai Baba's picture in the shrine. Such a thing is generally considered unworthy of being offered a second time. But she hoped that Baba would care more for her love than for the thing sent. Balakram was in the period of mourning consequent on the death of his father and such a one is usually considered impure to take such a holy gift.

Balakram took the *peda* with him to Shirdi, but in his hurry to see Sai Baba, forgot to take it to him. He took Baba's *darshan* with his own offerings. Baba waited for Balakram to recollect it. When Balakram visited Baba in the afternoon, he again forgot to take it. Baba said, "What did you bring for me from Bandra?" "Nothing", said Balakram. Baba repeated his question a little later but got no better reply. At last he said, "Did not the mother Tarkhad give you some sweetmeat for me?" The young man remembered the whole thing, and brought the *peda*. Baba eagerly received it and ate it at once. All the love and devotion of the lady were fully reciprocated by Baba.

There is M.W.Pradhan's experience: "While starting (i.e., on his visit to Shirdi) I had provided myself with three or four gold sovereigns ('guineas', as they were called) and some currency notes. I got a note changed so that I might be able to give silver rupees when Baba asked for *dakshina*. I had Rs.20/- in cash and the rest in notes. Baba was standing at the *Lendi* as though waiting for us. So we bowed to him. I took all the flowers, garlands and fruits to the *musjid* and gave him. I looked into his face and eyes, I felt that Baba was a great saint. Baba asked me for *dakshina*. Instead of giving him silver coins as I had intended at Kalyan, I put a sovereign in his hand. Baba turned it in his palm their and asked Noolkar, "What is this? What is its worth?" Noolkar replied, "It is worth Rs. 15/-" Baba returned the coin to me saying, I do not want this. Keep it and give me Rs. 15/-. I then gave Baba fifteen silver rupees. Baba counted them over and over and said, "Here is only Rs.10/- Give me Rs.5/- more!" I gladly gave him Rs.5/- Baba was obviously aware that the Rs.20/- in my pocket was intended for him and got it. He did not ask for more though I had a lot with me."

Cholkar, a poor clerk in the civil court at Thana, once heard of Baba's greatness and vowed to Baba – "Baba, I am a poor man and I am unable even to support my family. If by your grace I pass the departmental examination and get a permanent post I shall go to Shirdi for your *darshan* and distribute sugar candy in your name". Cholkar's wish was soon fulfilled. A poor Cholkar, anxious to fulfill his vow at the earliest, resolved to economize on his personal expenditure. He stopped using sugar in his tea and out of that saved enough money to fulfill his vow. He visited

Baba and distributed sugar candy in his name. Then Baba addressed Bapusaheb Jog who was seated in the mosque and pointing at Cholkrar, said, "Jog, take him to your house and give him cups of tea fully saturated with sugar". Cholkar was much moved and wonder–struck by Baba's omniscience.

Once a lawyer from Pandharpur humbly prostrated to Baba and, offered him *dakshina*. Baba glanced at him and remarked. "How cunning people are! They fall at the feet and offer *dakshina*, but shower abuses behind the back! Is not this wonderful?" Later when devotees were discussing what Baba might have meant, the lawyer told them, "The dart was aimed at me. The sub-judge of Pandharpur once stayed at Shirdi to improve his health. I was one of those who criticized his blind faith in Baba."

About the year 1911 one Somadeva Swami of Hardwar heard of Sai Baba's greatness and started for Shirdi. When his *tonga* approached Shirdi, he saw the flags that stood on Sai Baba's *musjid* and thought, "Why should a saint have a fancy for flags unless he has a craving for fame?" He was so much upset that he then and thee thought of returning to Hardwar. However, his fellow- travelers impressed upon him that he should better see the saint before making any decision. When finally he saw Sai Baba, he perceived the greatness of the *fakir* and tears of joy streamed down his cheeks. All his doubts melted into thin air. He remembered his *guru*'s watchword,
"That is our abode and place of rest where the mind is most pleased and charmed." On seeing him Baba got wild and yelled, "Go away. Beware if you come back to the *musjid!* Why take *darshan* of a sadhu that displays his banners over the *musjid!* Is this a sign of his sainthood? Get away!" Somadeva Swami was very much surprised to note that Baba was voicing his earlier feelings. Later Baba cooled down and received him well.

Rasane of Poona says, "I went to Baba, thinking that I would allot a share to him in the profits in a business transaction, and I was massaging his feet. Baba replied expressly that he did not want to get involved in any *samsara* like sharing the profits. So I gave up the idea". He records two more similar experiences:

"I had two questions in my mind and he gave answers to both:

1. 'There are so many crowding to Sai Baba . Do they all derive benefit from him?' To this he replied vocally. 'Look at the mango tree in blossom. If all flowers turned into ripe fruits, what a splendid crop it would be! But do they? Most of them fall off (either as flowers or as unripe fruits, owing to winds etc.). Very few remain!'

2. 'If Baba were to pass away, how hopelessly adrift I would be and how am I to fare then?' To this Baba answered that he would be with me whenever I thought of him, wherever I am. That promise he has kept up before 1918 and since too. He is still with me. He is still guiding me." As an instance of this he mentions: "There was a theft in my house. My old friend stole my wife's jewel-box including her auspicious *nathi*. I wept before Baba's photograph. The next day the man returned the jewel box and prayed for pardon."

Lakshman Govind Munge of Nasik went to see Baba sometime around 1890, accompanied by Gadgil and Nimonkar. When the three were to rest for the night, Gadgil set apart some dates, one

rupee, and a packet of joss-sticks to be given to Baba the next day. Next morning, on seeing him Baba said "give me my dates, my joss-sticks and my rupee!". Gadgil and Munge wondered at Baba's knowledge of their hearts wish. Baba at once disposed off the gifts, gave the rupee to the oilmonger who supplied oil for the lamps in the *musjid*. The joss-sticks were lighted and dates were distributed to all.

Smt. Bhikkubai, a young widow, was a close friend of Radhakrishnamai. The latter died in 1916 when Bhikkubai was at Ahmednagar. Later, on her way to Shirdi, Bhikkubai stopped at Kopergaon to take a dip in the sacred river Godavari. She remembered that Radhakrishnamai was cremated on the banks of the river. Her heart was full of sorrow and she silently blamed Sai Baba for not having saved her. Later she bought a flower garland, a water melon and milk-cakes (*peda*) as gifts to Baba. On her arrival at Shirdi, Baba said to her, "I don't want this garland of mental uneasiness." When she tried to garland him in spite of his protest, the garland mysteriously snapped into three parts, one in each of her hands and the third fell on the floor! When she put the milk-sweets and pieces of the melon before him, Baba said to Dixit and others who tried to persuade him to accept the same, "This woman was weeping and shedding tears at the Godavari and she has brought it with a troubled heart and so I will not accept it."

In the very early years of Sai Baba's advent at Shirdi, Nana Saheb Nimonkar was once told by his uncle Balawantrao (father of Shama) of Shirdi about Baba, "People believe he is a mad *fakir*. I doubt if he is really mad, but you had better go with me, see him and give me your opinion." Earlier, whenever Balawantrao had gone to see him, Sai Baba kept him at a distance by threatening to fling brickbat at him. But when Nana Saheb Nimonkar went with Balawantrao he allowed them to go quite close to him. Nimonkar's heart was charmed by Baba at the very first sight and he assured his uncle that Sai Baba was a great saint. But Balawantrao wondered why, Baba hurled stones at him earlier, and not on this occasion. Nimonkar said to him, "That was because you doubted if he was mad whereas I did not."

Somanath Nimonkar (Nansaheb Nimonkar's son) left plague-sticken Pune for his native place Nimon during the Christmas vacation in 1917. He took his first son Gopal, aged three years, with him and on the way halted at Shirdi. When they later sought his leave to proceed to Nimon, Baba gave *udi* to Somanath and said, "Go and save the child." Somanath took it for a casual blessing to his son and so gave some *udi* to Gopal and started for Nimon. But when he reached home he realized the true significance of Baba's words. His brother's twelve-day-baby was in a critical condition. And Somanath discovered, to his despair, that he had lost the *udi* that Baba gave him! So taking the child in his lap, he fervently prayed to Baba and in fifteen minutes the child started recovering.

One day Baba was smoking his *chilim* and passing it round among those near. One Mr. Kolambe, a smoker of *beedies*, was seated at some distance. He felt a desire to have a puff or two out of the *chilim*. At once Baba called out to him, "You boy, come here! Why keep yourself so far? Come near and have a smoke!" Kolambe joined the group and enjoyed a few puffs.

On a later visit to Shirdi, Baba asked *dakshina* from everyone except Kolambe. Kolambe was happy when he thought that Baba was thereby revealing to him that he had taken note of his having given up his vicious habit of drinking. And later, when everyone had retired to the wada

Kolambe was boasting of his immunity from Baba's demands of *dakshina*. At once Baba sent word to him and demanded Rs. 2/- as *dakshina* from him and received it.

Another devotee who had come to Shirdi deposited his balance of Rs. 18/- with Kolambe in secret so that he might truthfully tell Baba that he had no money if he should ask for *dakshina*. Baba turned to him and asked for Rs. 2/- as *dakshina* and added, "Take it from this man (i.e. Kolambe) and give it." The man's device was obviously found out by Baba! The man then readily paid it!!

W.G. Pradhan of Bombay lost his seven-year-old son and was much upset. He later heard of Sai Baba and visited him. Baba angrily said of him to other devotees, "Why does this fool go on lamenting the death of a son? It is merely going to the earth. The body must go to the earth. Why go on lamenting that?" Then he began to describe, in detail, Pradhan's house and garden and stated even the number of *sitaphal* and *ramaphal* trees in it.

M.B. Rege was a beloved devotee of Baba. Once he decided to visit Shirdi for *Sri Ramanavami* festival. While searching for proper gift to Baba in shop he saw a beautiful muslin piece, wondered how beautiful Baba would look when clad in it, purchased it and reached Shirdi. It was customary for Baba to receive such gifts from devotees and return the same to them. When Baba was busy receiving and returning gifts to devotees Rege stealthily put his muslin cloth beneath Baba's seat, unnoticed by anyone. At the end of it all Baba stood up saying "Clear off all that lies on the *gaddi*(seat) and dust it." When the mattress was removed Baba picked up the muslin, hugged it saying "How fine is the muslin! I shall not return this. This is mine!" He then put it on and looking at Rege said, "Do I not look beautiful in this?"

In 1914, G.G. Narke was once watching Baba as he distributed *kufnis* (the long gowns which *fakirs* wear) to a number of his devotees and wished that Baba should give him one. Baba stopped the distribution, turned to Narke and said, "Do not blame me for not giving you a *kufni*. That *fakir* (God) has not permitted me to give you one." Similarly, in 1916 Narke arrived at Shirdi and learned that Baba was sending one Vaman Rao to beg food on his behalf and wishes that he should be given that service. However, Narke later gave up the thought and visited Sai in his full suit. Baba said that from that day onwards Narke should beg on his behalf. This service was allowed to Narke for four months!

S.B. Dhumal was one of the beloved devotees of Baba. One day Baba said to him, "Bhau, the whole of last night I had no sleep." "Baba, why so?" asked Dhumal. "I was thinking and thinking of you all the night", Baba said. Dhumal was overwhelmed and shed tears of joy. Baba was thereby assuring him that He was conscious of the constant remembrance of Him (Baba) that Dhumal was practising.

Once this devotee persuaded Radhakrishnamai to part with her colored portrait of Baba and was passing before the mosque, wishing to get it consecrated by Baba's touch later. Baba at once called Dhumal into the mosque and asked him what he was carrying. Then he took the picture in his hand, gazed at it steadily both at its front and rear and then returned it saying, "Keep it". Dhumal's wish was thus at once granted.

In 1915 Nachne of Thana was leaving for Shirdi. At the railway station one V.S. Samant gave him coconut and two *annas* with which to buy candy as his offering to Baba. When Nachne reached Shirdi he gave the coconut to Baba but forgot all about the two *annas*. Baba wanted to see if he would recollect it. At least, when Nachne asked Baba's permission to return home, Baba said "But why keep back a poor brahmin's two *annas*?" When Nachne gave him the two *annas* and asked for his pardon, Baba said, "Whatever you undertake to do, do thoroughly; else do not undertake it."

Khanderao Garde was the disciple of Shri Ramanand Bidkar Maharaj who was a saint of great powers and a disciple of Sri Akkalkot Maharaj. His *guru* told him that Garde should visit a number of saints who would, even at the very sight of him, recognize him as one of their own stock. One of these saints he mentioned was Sri Sai Baba. Bidkar Maharaj told him that Sai would greet him as 'Ramadas'. Accordingly he visited Shirdi in 1912 or so. On seeing Garde, Sai Baba welcomed him saying "Welcome Ramadas!" Obviously the reference to Garde meant "a disciple of Ramanand."

One V.S.Joshi had sent Rs. 10/- to Baba as *dakshina* through a friend who was going to Shirdi and requested him to take a photograph of Baba. The friend, on reaching Shirdi, gave Baba the *dakshina* but had not the courage to take the photograph. After a few minutes Baba suddenly told the gentleman to take his photograph the latter took two snaps of Baba one in a sitting posture and the other in standing posture.

Baba's knowledge of the future which is an aspect of his omniscience is illustrated by following *leelas*:

In December 1910, one day Dixit and Nana Chandorkar persuaded their friend Sahasrabudhe to go for the *darshan* of Baba. On the way, a gentleman met him at Kopergaon and said of Baba, "I know that mad *fakir* well". Sahasrabudhe was in doubt whether the remark was indeed true. When he reached Shirdi, and bowed to Baba, the latter said, "You must bow down to Noolkar and to Bapusaheb Jog; that does not lower us in anywise." When he did accordingly, Baba told him to serve Noolkar wholeheartedly. He went on repeating the same words. Sahasrabudhe then requested Noolkar to tell him what service he could render him. Noolkar was embarrassed and said, "Whatever Baba might have told you, please do not tease me like this." Replied Sahasrabudhe, "But tell me whether you have some hidden powers." Noolkar denied any such. Then Sahasrabudhe asked Baba repeatedly what he meant in ordering him to serve Noolkar. At last Baba said, "Experience is not for bullocks (like you). Only he who knows can receive it." Sahasrabudhe concluded that there is some hidden truth in Baba's words and decided not to leave Shirdi before knowing it. "All right!", said Baba answering his unspoken thought. Later Shama asked Baba, "When will you give leave to Sahasrabudhe to go home" Baba brusquely replied, "I've things to work out with him. Let him stay on here like a dog!"

On another occasion Baba said of Noolkar, "He is my fellow. He has none beside me as his own." These words came true shortly after. Noolkar feel ill and he decided not to leave Shirdi till he got well. After one year he passed away in March. Sahasrabudhe had to serve Noolkar in his last days. How prophetic were Baba's words!

One day a thought arose in Sahasrabudhe's mind. "While the scriptures proclaim that a *guru* makes his disciple like himself, why does not Baba make me like Him? " This thought recurred to him again and again for three days. Finally Baba said to Shama, pointing at Sahasrabudhe, "This fellow wants to drive me out of my seat and occupy it himself. But it needs a lot of patience". No one except Sahasrabudhe knew that Baba was responding to an unuttered thought.

In December 1910 a little before his death, Noolkar said to Sahasrabudhe, "Sai did not want me to suffer in my last days. So he has brought you here to serve me."

Sometime before his demise Noolkar wanted to go home. Baba at first gave him leave but soon called him back and said, "Cremate that fellow in Lindibagh and go!" No one understood whom he meant. Even Mahalsapathy could only say that a calamity was impending for Noolkar. Indeed as per Noolkar's last wish he was cremated in Lendibagh. When Baba spoke the above words, by 'him', he meant Noolkar's physical body. For, in truth, man is a deathless spirit and only the body is mortal and needs to be cremated. It was also an assurance that he i.e. Noolkar, the spirit, would shuffle off his body in complete awareness before leaving for his real spiritual home. In fact Noolkar passed away in full awareness, with his mind concentrated on Baba and after Sahasrabudhe had poured the holy washing of Baba's feet in his mouth.

One day in the presence of Imam Bhai Chote Khan, Sai Baba spoke cryptically to an elderly lady (called *mavusi*) about a thorn pricking in the foot and losing of one of the parents. No one could understand to whom Baba reffered. The devotee was in a hurry to return home and at last he went away even without Baba's permission. He writes: "Two days after my return home, my mother struck a thorn in her foot while colleting fuel and she died 8 or 10 days later, as her leg had swollen. Then I understood what Baba said to the lady about thorn and losing of one's parent.

On the 4th day of her death, I came to Shirdi as I had no funds and employments and was hoping that Baba would relieve my financial distress. I stayed on for 34 days or so and Baba said to *mavusi*, in my presence, "*udi* must be received and then leave for departure must be taken." I at once inferred that Baba meant those words for me. Baba's usual method is to address words to someone when they are meant for another or to address them to a whole group when only one of them is concerned. Next morning, Baba extended his hands with *udi* when I approached him and thus confirmed my inference. At that time of giving *udi* Baba said "At the door way of the house(i.e., my house), there will be an old woman standing. She will give something using
which, celebrations may be performed. Guests have come. The feast should be had in their company." I could not make out Baba's meaning then. On going home the widow of the Kazi, a very old lady, was standing at my door and out of love or friendship for me, put fifty rupees in my hand, and said: "Perform your ceremonies." That was the fortieth day of my mother's death when the ceremonies had to be performed and for that, my four sisters and their husbands had come (home) in my absence. These evidently were the guests mentioned by Baba. I celebrated the fortieth day with the money given to me by the old lady.

On my next visit to Shirdi a month or so later, Baba said to me: "*Gulab* (rose) has come to your house." I went back and found that my wife had recently delivered a male child. Believing that to be the "Gulab"(rose) mentioned by Baba, the boy was named "Gulab".

One day a lizard on the wall of the mosque ticked. A devotee asked Sai what the omen was. The Master said that the creature was happy that her sister was coming from Aurangabad! The devotee was puzzled. After sometime, a man came from Aurangabad on horse-back. He took out a bag to fetch pulses for the horse and shook off the dust on it. A lizard fell out of it and climbed up the wall. The two creatures met and played together!

When Nanasaheb Bere and his friends sought Sai's permission to return, he said "Start at once and proceed fast!" they started in two *tongas*. Bere hurried the driver to proceed faster. His friends followed slowly in the other tonga as they thought that there was plenty of time. Their *tonga* was attacked by highwaymen whereas Bere escaped. One has to implicitly obey the *guru's* order, both in spiritual and worldly matters.

Baba's omniscience, includes his accurate knowledge of the entire past of his devotees extending to their previous lives. The sceptical ones might suppose that Baba's reference to past lives of his devotees might be part of a mystification and an awe-inspiring stunt of wicked *fakir*. But such a view only reveals a deep-rooted blindness on our part regarding the other aspects of Sai Baba's greatness and especially of his virtues like humility. Then we need remember that after all, modern scientific research too in the field of parapsychology, like that of Prof. Ian Stevenson, tends to confirm the truth of this phenomenon. And such classics on practical *yoga* as Patanjali's *yoga aphorisms* contain specific spiritual practices by which one could acquire such occult powers.

What a source of immense gratitude would it be to a devotee who realizes that Baba had been watching him by his omniscient gaze all through his past, long before he even heard of such a one like Sai Baba! This would assure his devotees that in Baba they have a competent one to judge the higher justice that underlies the seeming caprices of fortune they may undergo in their lives and thus it would enable them to rest content when he chooses to allow his devotees to undergo certain of their hardships while relieving them of some other. This kind of omniscience reveals that the possessor of it intimately knows the will of God both far ahead of its actual manifestation and long after it too. There can be no greater safety to a devotee than to resort to such a one. Now we shall notice a few such incidents.

Balwant Nachne visited Shirdi somewhere about 1915. One night, at about 8 p.m., he went to *Dwarakamai* and asked Sai Baba "What *japa* shall I make?" Baba said, "Go to Devpur (a village twenty miles from Kopergaon) and worship the stones there which your ancestors worshipped." On his return he asked his father about it. His father told him that their ancestors worshipped some images at Devpur for several generations. Further, Nachne's ancestor by five degrees, Baba Prayag had no children till he was sixty and he resorted to a saint, Baba Bhagwat (a Disciple of Saint Eknath Maharaj) at Triambak. He was blessed with a son within one year. The saint Baba Bhagwat took the child, hardly one year old, to Devpur and gave it a handwritten copy of *The Jnaneswari*. Ever since, it became a tradition for every descendent of the family to go to Devpur and take initiation from a member of that *guru's* lineage. All this was at the heart of Baba's crisp reply to Nachne's question.

Nachne did not follow Baba's instruction till 1927 i.e., till 5 years after Baba's *mahasamadhi*. In 1927, Nachne happened to see a great saint by name Nanu Maharaj. The saint was hardly 15 years old! On seeing Nanchne he asked him, "Have you gone to Devpur?" Surprised at the pin- pointed accuracy of the question he had to admit he hadn't done so and he also explained the reasons for it. Nanu Maharaj replied, "What if there is no one older than you in the lineage of your ancestoral *guru?* My own *guru* is younger than I. His name is Doipode. The name of your *guru* is Bhagwat." Nachne wondered how young the *guru* of Nanu Maharaj could be. The latter promised to show him his *guru*. Soon after Nachne went to Devpur and got initiated by young Bhagwat. A year after that he came to know that Nanu Maharaj was to visit Bombay and went there. Nanu Maharaj showed him his eight-year-old *guru* Sripada Doipode. This incident reveals that Sai Baba's knowledge of Nachne's past extended to several generations and the direction is borne out by the words of another great saint Nanu Maharaj.

In the 7th Chapter we mentioned about two visitors from Goa to one of whom Baba demonstrated that he was Lord Datta. We shall mention what he said to the other.

Baba spoke regarding the second visitor from Goa in his characteristic veiled language, identifying himself with the latter. He said that a Brahmin who was his trusted cook for thirty five years fell into bad company and evil ways. Once he removed a stone in the wall and stole away currency notes worth Rs.30,000/-. He was almost obsessed with the loss when a *fakir* going along the road, came to him and enquired after the cause of his sadness. On knowing the truth, the *fakir* advised him to vow to a great saint at Shirdi by name Sai Baba, that he would visit Shirdi and worship Sai if and when he got back his money. The *fakir* also advised him to know not to eat one of his favourite dishes at meal till such time. And the man followed the *fakir*'s directions. And to his great surprise, the Brahmin cook came back to him, and returning the money with great penitence, begged his pardon! The visitor promptly started on his promised trip to Shirdi. But the captain of the ship said that there was no accommodation in the vessel. Soon, a peon, a perfect stranger came there and interceded for him with the captain. At last, the captian took the man in the vessel and the latter eventually arrived at Shirdi. The only thing he vowed was that he would take *darshan* of Sai Baba if he got back his lost sum. And he did. So he was not indebted anymore to the Lord. Then how and why should Sai Baba accept his *dakshina?*

Now we shall turn to Sai Baba's knowledge of the past lives of persons and even of animals.

When Prof. G.G Narke first visited Sai Baba, the latter said to Shama who was about to introduce the visitor. "You introduce him to me? I have known him for thirty lives!" Similarly, when Raghuvir Purandhare visited Baba in 1909, the latter said to Purandhare that they were connected for seven centuries. He added, "I will not forget him. I will always remember him even if he is away- even more than 2,000 miles! I will not eat even a bit without him."

M.W.Pradhan had a son by name 'Babu'. Sai Baba was particularly fond of him. Nearly a year before Babu's birth Sai Baba pointed out Mrs.Pradhan to Shama and said, "She is the mother of my Babu." Sai Baba once told his devotees about Babu's past life thus: "A pious old man lived at Shirdi for twelve years. His wife and his grown-up sons who were at Jalna repeatedly requested him to return to them. At last he went on horse back and I (i.e., Sai Baba) followed him in a cart. After a time,this old man married a young girl, the daughter of his own sister and

had a son by her. The boy was later poisoned by *biradars* and was born as Babu, and Babu, after his death, is now born again in Bombay."

In a similar vein Sai Baba once told Balasaheb Bhate that the latter was a *khatri* in his past life and that his wife and son of the present life were of a weaver's caste in their past life. He said that his devotee Vasudeva Kaka was, in his past life, a Rajput named Jai Singh who had a daughter of loose morals; that the latter become a mistress of a barber. He said, on another occasion that his devotee Smt. Chandrabai Borkar was his sister in her past seven births.

V.H. Thakur, a clerk in the Revenue Department, once went to Vadagaon on offical duty and there he took *darshan* of a famous Kanarese saint named Appa. When Thakur bowed to him, the saint blessed him and said, "When you go to the North on your official tours you will meet a very great saint who will show you the path to peace." He also told Thakur to study the mystical work *Vichara Sagara*.

Later, Thakur was transferred to Junnar. To reach that place he had to cross a very steep ghat called *Nhane ghat* on the back of a buffalow. The ride pained his body much. Later, he was posted further North at Kalyan where he came into contact with Nanasaheb Chandorkar and heard of Sai Baba's greatness from him. He yearned to take Baba's *darshan*.

When Thakur later saw Sai Baba he was over-joyed and his eyes were brimmed with tears. Looking at him Baba said, "The path shown in this place is not as easy as the teachings of Appa the Kanarese saint, or even as the buffalow-ride across the *Nhane ghat*. In this spiritual path you have to exert your utmost efforts." Thakur at once realized that he was the very great 'Saint' that appa told him of and bowed to Baba. Baba blessed him and said, "What Appa told you was alright but these things have to be practiced and lived. Mere reading won't do. Mere study without practice and the grace of the *guru* is of no use."

Anwar Khan Kaji of Ahmednagar wanted to rebuild a *musjid* at Telikakoot (*Kajichi musjid*). He came to Baba for funds to repair the *musjid*. Baba told him after he had waited long, that the *musjid* would not accept any money from him or others but would herself provide the funds. 'Dig three feet under the *nimbar* (i.e., niche), and you will find a treasure. Rebuild the *musjid* with that', Baba said. Then the Kaji went to Ahmednagar, found the treasure, rebuilt it and came to Shirdi and told me and others of the above facts.

Sai once said, "One morning I strolled along, had a bath in a rivulet. As I prepared the *chilm* (pipe),a traveler turned up and sat by me. We heard a croaking. I told him that a frog was caught by a snake and was crying. I went and addressed the creatures, 'Oh Veerabhadrappa and Chennabasappa, fie upon your enmity even after taking such low birth? Give it up and rest in peace!' The snake at once left the frog and the two creatures escaped. I then explained: Devotees raised money for the renovation of a dilapidated temple. Twice, a rich man swindled the funds. Once God appeared in his wife's dream and said,'Renovate the temple, I'll reward you hundred-fold.' Her husband cleverly put her off. After some days the Lord again appeared in her dream and she offered her jewels for the purpose. The greedy husband undervalued them and, in exchange, gave a piece of barrenland to the temple priest towards the expenses of daily worship. Originally it was mortgaged to him by a poor woman for Rs. 200/- which she could not redeem.

In the next life, the miser was born as a brahmin named Veerabhadrappa. His devout wife was reborn as Gauri, the daughter of the temple priest. The poor woman who mortgaged the land was born as Chennabasappa.

The priest was devoted to me. I told him the bridegroom would himself come seeking his daughter in marriage. One day the poor boy, Veerabhadrappa, came to his house and, on my advice, Gauri was married to him. Even in that life, he hankered after money. By a sudden twist of circumstances the barren land was sold at a lakh rupees. There was a quarrel for the money. When they came to me, I said that the money is God's and was to be entrusted to the priest and that Gauri was the heiress to it; that her husband had no right over it. Veerabhadrappa was wild and imputed evil motives to me. That night, the lord appeared in Gauri's dream and told her to spend a portion of the money for renovating the temple and to consult me (i.e., Baba) with regard to it. Chennabasappa and Veeraghadrappa quarrelled for the money. The latter threatned the former with death. Chennabasappa sought my protection and I assured him of it. Owing to hatred Veerabhadrappa is born as the snake and the timid Chennabasappa is born as a frog. True to my pledge, I have rescued the latter now." Sai stands by his word to the very end of time.

Sai Baba's Daily Life

As days passed devotees started streaming to Shirdi in evergrowing numbers. The village was fast blossoming into a famous center of pilgrimage. As gifts and presentations flowed in, the pomp and ceremony of Sai worship were fast growing. But Sai Baba's life of a *fakir* remained calm and undisturbed. He never allowed his personal life to be in any way altered. And therein is the saint's spiritual glory. We might glimpse at his daily life.

I

In the morning Sai Baba used to get up quite early and he first attended to his prayers. At such times Baba generally used to be near the *dhuni* or the sacred fire, facing south, leaning on a post, doing something which was difficult for others to perceive clearly. For, at such moments people were not allowed to go near him, not even within a range of fifty yards. The servants and attendants could carry on their usual service of cleaning things or replenishing the fuel in the *dhuni* or sacred fire. He used to mutter words like *"Yade Haq"* but they were seldom clear or loud enough to be overheard at such a distance. Then he would arrange the fuel in the sacred fire and, sitting before it, he would go on telling his devotees to what distant places he went
overnight in subtle *yogic* body and what he had done to his devotees there. His statements were found to be literally true on verification.

At times he would talk of the after-death experiences of a departing soul whom he had helped on the previous night.

As befitting the rules of conduct ordained to a celibate *fakir*, Baba did not wash himself except on every third day. And when he did, people noticed what extraordinary control he had over his physical frame. He went to a well near a banyan tree and washed his mouth and body. Some lepers and other patients often approached him and besprinkled themselves with the water that he spat out. And their faith was amply rewarded.

On some occasions Baba's method of washing himself was frighteningly marvelous. He was seen to vomit his intestines, clean them thoroughly with water and place them on a small shrub to dry and he would then swallow all again! How this was possible for him we shall note when we refer to the manner of his sleeping.

Then Baba went out on his first round of begging food. He never ate in anyone's house nor did he cook for himself. He never kept any food in store for the next meal. He remained a true mendicant to the last day of his life, begging his food from a few houses a day, though towards the peak years of his fame the gifts of money that the devotees gave him amounted to three to four hundred rupees a day and many a millionaire was literally choking him with the daintiest of sweets and savouries as their offerings. Baba never cared to touch them but distributed them freely to all and sustained himself by his begging.

While starting out on his begging rounds Baba would fold a garment over his shoulder in the form of a bag that dangled below his left arm and holding a can or a tin mug in his other hand, he approached a few houses, about five a day, and called out, "Mother, please give me a *roti!*" He used to receive all liquid and semi-liquid foods like soup, vegetables, milk or buttermilk in the tin pot. Solid food like cooked rice or *roti* were received in the folds of the garment. Then he returned to the *musjid*, put a small *roti* and rice in the sacred-fire as a sacred offering and placed the rest of it in a mud pot. Exposed or uncovered, cats and dogs, beggars and servants took freely from it and Baba never drove them away nor did he ever feel any revulsion for them. He never

cared for the taste of the food while eating it. He freely mixed all the food of diverse tastes, into one mass and ate a few handfuls of it. His devotees were thrilled to note his perfect conquest of the palate and perfect sense of equality to all creatures, the very perfection of what the world's scriptures had enjoined for the true seeker of god. Those who lacked this perception, however, felt the whole thing repulsive and confirmed that here was a mad *fakir*. Sai Baba viewed the whole creation as nothing but the manifestation of god's spirit; what, then, is unholy for such a one?

One of the houses to which Sai Baba went very often to beg was that of Tatya Baba Kote. He used to go there precisely when Tatya took his meal. Tatya Baba Kote was then a pupil in the village school and Madhavrao Deshpande ('Shama') was his teacher. The school was conducted in the Maruthi temple. Often Tatya and other lads assembled near the entrance of the mosque after or before the school hours to annoy Sai Baba by throwing stones at him. When Sai Baba abused them, the boys used to laugh. When Baba pretended to chase them, they would run away.

Tatya's mother, Bayajibai, had great regard for Sai Baba. So she invariably offered him a seat. Tatya, then a boy, would run to him and climb up his back playfully. His mother used to scold the boy and ask him not to be so rude and unruly to the holy visitor; but Baba himself kept quiet. Bayajibai always requested Baba to eat the *rotis* she gave him there itself. Occasionally he acceded to her request. She then used to give him milk or buttermilk, onions, *pappad* and pickles which he accepted. The year after his arrival at Shirdi, there was a severe famine in that area. At that time Baba did not beg anywhere except at the rich Nandaram's house and at Tatya's and he received only half a *roti* from each house.

Sometimes Baba begged food as often as fifteen times in a day at Tatya's, as though to put the lady's faith to test. But Bayajibai never sent him away without giving him something or the other.

In those days devotees started flocking to Shirdi from big cities like Bombay and they brought with them sweetmeat and other delicacies. Baba often gave these to Tatya, sometimes even waiting for him for hours. Strangely enough, he never gave any such dainties to Mahalsapathy (who was one of the poorest and dearest of his devotees) as though he wanted him to learn to keep his palate under control.

After the morning 'breakfast' Baba used to go for his forenoon stroll to the garden Lendibaugh. Devotees followed him wherever he went but no one was allowed to enter the garden when he did. What he used to do there remained a mystery to many for a long time. The only one who was allowed to attend on him there was his *moslem* devotee Abdul Baba. He seems to have been one of the chosen devotees of Baba. For, his coming to Baba was characterized by a special gesture from the Godman. Let us listen to Abdul's own account of it:

"I came to Shirdi forty-five years ago from Nanded, on the banks of the river Tapti. I was under the care of the *fakir* Amiruddin of Nanded. Sai Baba appeared in the dream of that *fakir* and, delivering two mangoes to him, directed him to give those fruits to me and to send me to Shirdi. Accordingly, the *fakir* gave me the fruits and bade me to go to Sai Baba of Shirdi. I came here in my twentieth year.Baba welcomed me saying, 'My crow has come'. Baba directed me to devote

myself entirely to his service. From the beginning, I lighted and fed with oil the five perpetual lamps, i.e., those at Lendi, *musjid, chavadi* and other places.

I used to look after the Lendi and the ever-burning light maintained by Baba there. It was, in those days, placed in a hollow in the earth, scooped to the depth of about two feet and protected with a cover from being blown out. There was a pandal. A zinc sheet was the top of the pandal. Some twenty curtains were tied all round, to form something like a tent. I remained in it and looked after the lamp in the centre of it. That light is shifted from its place now, very slightly, and is put in a raised pillar of bricks and mortar containing an enclosed chamber for it. At Lendibaugh, Baba would sit close to the light. He sat behind the lamp-post and not in front of it.
The lamp was not visible to him. I never saw him gazing at it. I filled two buckets with water and placed them near him. This water, he would scatter all around that lamp. He would get up from the light and walk a few yards in each direction and go on gazing in that (cardinal) direction. I do not know why he did like that or whether he uttered any *mantra* while doing so."

By about 10 a.m. Baba returned from Lendibaugh and then for an hour and a half he sat with visitors. A detailed picture of these items of Sai Baba's daily life are given as recorded by Khaparde in his "Shirdi Diary" in a latter section. Sometimes, during this period, he would again go out for another round of begging. At about noon, arti was performed by the devotees, at the end of which Baba distributed *'udi'* to all of them and they left for lunch. Devotees used to get the first portions of their lunch or some other special delicacy prepared for the occasion as offering to Baba. Baba sometimes took the whole offering and distributed it to all and left a little for the devotee. Along with some devotees like Bade Baba and Shama, Sai Baba sat inside the *musjid* for lunch and usually curtains were drawn for privacy for his devotees. None was expected to enter the *musjid* once the curtain was lowered.

The mosque was an old mud structure in such a bad shape that now and then some of the earth and stones used to fall off from the ceiling. One day Baba, along with some of his devotees, was having his lunch. Suddenly a crackling sound was heard overhead by all. At once Baba lifted his hand up in a gesture and said, *"Sabar Sabar"* (i.e., "wait, wait"). The noise stopped. When

everyone had finished his meal, along with the devotees Baba also came out. At once a huge part of the ceiling - earth, stones and parts of the rafters fell down with a loud noise exactly in the spot where Baba was seated earlier. Only then did every one understand that Baba said, "Wait" to the crashing roof and it did wait.

Once Sai Baba appeared to a lady at Burhampore in her dream, standing at her door and begging for *kichadi* (i.e., rice cooked with dal or pulses and salt). Later, when her husband was transferred to Akola, they went to Shirdi and stayed there for two months. The lady longed very much to serve *kichadi* to Baba as he asked her for it in her dream-vision but for some reason or the other she could not do so for sixteen days. On the seventeenth day she could at last prepare *kichadi*. By the time she arrived there, Baba already sat for lunch and the curtain was lowered. At first she was a little disappointed. But soon she threw up the curtain and entered with the offering. Precisely Sai Baba was saying that he wanted *kichadi* first and the devotees were in a fix as there was no *kichadi*. Exactly at the moment, the lady of Burhampore was there with it! Baba took it eagerly and ate it. Baba wanted to demonstrate to her that the experience she had at her home town was not just a dream, but a vision which he graciously vouched her.

Immediately after lunch, Baba sent his devotees away to their lodgings and often spent sometime alone. No one went to him at that time as he was thought to be in his mystic meditation. However, very few devotees happened to enter the *musjid* at that hour, i.e., between 12 noon and 2 p.m. and noticed that Baba was engaged in a very strange mystic rite. Das Ganu Maharaj describes it thus: "Baba was occasionally doing something strange between 1 and 2 p.m. at the mosque with a cloth screen in front of him and when he was alone. He would take out of a pouch ten or fifteen old coins. They were of various values and descriptions, i.e., three paise, one *anna*, two, four and eight *anna* pieces and one rupee coins. He would rub his finger tips constantly yet gently against their surfaces (whether with or without *mantra*, I cannot say). Their surfaces had all become worn out and smooth. He would say, as he rubbed his finger against the coins, 'This is Nana's, this is Bapu's, this is Kaka's', etc. If anyone approached him, he put them back in the pouch and hid them."

At about 2.30 p.m. or so, devotees and visitors again assembled in the mosque and put all their petitions before him. Towards evening Baba just walked in the front-yard of the mosque, and stood for sometime near the outer wall, leaning against it and talking to the passers-by along the road. The place is marked now with his *padukas* there. At about five, he again went to the Lendi and returned at sunset when devotees performed *arti*.

Then Baba spent some time with devotees narrating some parables. Then he gave the daily gifts of money to beggars and some devotees there by emptying his pockets of the day's collections of *dakshina*. Then he sent all home, for the evening meal. Some people used to stay on with him a little longer. And at night, they would all return to their lodgings leaving Baba to rest. There is a strange incident connected with Baba's method of sleeping. At first Baba kept a sack-cloth as his seat during the day and as a bed at night. Several sheets of cloth later came to be added to it as gifts from devotees.

Once, a devotee by name Dengle presented a wooden plank, about 4 ½ feet long and about 3/4th of a foot wide, to Baba so that he might use it as a sleeping board. Baba accepted the gift and used it but in a strange manner.

When he was alone, Baba somehow managed to suspend the plank from the ceiling of the mosque, about seven feet above the ground and nearly a foot and a half below the roof, by means of thin strips of cloth. They were indeed so worn-out that people wondered how they bore the weight of the wooden plank. On the four corners of the plank he kept four earthenware oil lamps burning all through the night. And Baba slept on the plank!

People wondered how the strips of cloth bore the weight of the plank and of Baba's body? Then, how could Baba accommodate himself on such a small plank without disturbing the oil lamps or snapping the strips of cloth? And how did he climb up to such a height without the help of any ladder or support? People flocked there to watch Baba getting upon it. But no one ever saw him doing that. When the crowds became too big and it started being a virtual stampede, one day Baba broke the wooden plank and threw it in the *dhuni*. Then a devotee, H.S. Dixit offered to give Baba a cot to sleep on. Baba said, "I do not want it. Am I to lie on a cot, leaving Mahalsapathy on the floor? Far better would it be if he should sleep higher". Dixit then offered two planks, one for Baba, one for Mahalsapathy. Baba replied, "Sleeping on the plank is no joke. Who will sleep keeping his eyes open, all awake, like me? Only such a person can lie on the plank. Even when I lie on the ground I ask Mahalsapathy to sit by me and keep his palm on my chest. I lie down making mental *namasmarana* (remembrance of Lord's names) and I say to Mahalsapathy, 'Feel it by placing your hand on my heart. If you catch me dozing, wake me up'. Such was and is my order to him. So you see that a plank will be of no use to him!" One is reminded of the verse in The *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter II, verse 69 which says: "What is night to
all beings, therein a restrained man (or a sage) is awake and where all beings are awake, that is night for a muni (seer)". How literally the verse could be true in the case of such a great seer as Baba!

Baba never allowed anyone else to stay with him at the mosque at night except his closest devotees, Tatya Kote Patil and Mahalsapathy. The three were quite intimate. They slept in the *musjid* with their heads towards the east, west and north and with their feet touching one another at the centre of the mosque. The three stretched themselves on their beds and went on chitchatting till midnight. Baba slept very little and perhaps intended to inculcate the same habit in these devotees too. Annasaheb Dabholkar, describes the scene vividly in his hook "Sai Satcharitra" – "If Tatya began to snore, Baba at once got up and shook him from side to side and pressed his head, or with Mahalsapathy, hugged him close, stroked his legs and kneaded his
back. In this way for full fourteen years, Tatya, leaving his parents at home, slept in the *musjid* on account of his love for Baba. How happy and never-to-be-forgotten were those days! How to measure that love and value the grace of Baba? After the passing away of his father, Tatya took charge of his household affairs and began to sleep at home."

II

In this section we shall look more closely at what Baba said and did. I shall quote extensively from Khaparde's "Shirdi Diary". This enhances the feeling of Sai Baba's presence and when read on a visit to Shirdi, this section lends a new dimension altogether to our stay there.

After his night's sojourn in the *chavadi* the devotees offered the first *arti* (worshipful offering of light) early in the morning. It was called the *kakad arti*. In the mean a while, the mosque was kept clean by the devotee Madhav Fasle. After the *arti*, Fasle would request Sai Baba to come to the mosque. Sai Baba never stirred from his seat without Fasle coming to invite him to do so. Then he returned to the mosque.

Mr.Khaparde describes his attendance at the *kakad arti* in his "Shirdi Diary" :-

26-12-1911 : "I got up early and attended *kakad arti*. Sai Maharaj was rather in (an) unusual mood, took his stick (*satka*) and with it tapped the ground round about. By the time he descended the steps of the *chavadi*, he walked twice backwards and forward and used violent language."

7-1-1912 : "In the morning I got up early and attended the *kakad arti*. Sayin Maharaj looked exceedingly pleased and gave (me) *yogic* glances. I passed the whole day in a sort of ecstasy."…

17-1-1912 : "We went to the *chavadi* for *kakad arti*. Megha was too ill to attend. So Bapu Saheb Jog did the *arti*. Sayin Baba showed his face and smiled most benignly. It is worthwhile spending years here to see it even once. I was overjoyed and stood gazing like a mad man."

14-2-1912 : "I got up early, attended the *kakad arti* and was very much struck by the fact that Sayin Baba, on leaving the *chavadi*, made passes with his short stick towards the east, north and south. Then he proceeded with hard words as usual .. later on we went to the *musjid*. He narrated two stories.

(1) A traveller was accosted in the morning by a demon (*rakshasa*) and looked upon it as a bad omen, but on proceeding further he saw two wells, the sweet water of which slaked his thirst. When he felt hungry, he met a husband man who, on the suggestion of his wife, supplied him with food. He saw a field ripe with corn and wished to have *harda*. The owner of the field gave it to him. So the traveler felt happy and proceeded, merrily smoking. In the forest through which he was passing he met a tiger, lost courage, and hid himself in a cave. The tiger was very big and wandered about him. Sayin Baba who happened to be passing that way, instilled courage in him, got him out and put him on his way, saying, 'The tiger would not hurt you unless you hurt him some way'.

Meaning of the parable : Individual self, ego or *jiva* is the traveller. *Agnana* (nescience) is the demon. Thirst for perfection is his hunger. Spiritual teaching is the food he got. The two wells stand for *'viveka'* or right discrimination and *vairagya* or dispassion. *Harda* stands for grace. The mysterious depths of consciousness of a *sadhaka* or a seeker is the forest. The tiger stands for the dangers that confront a seeker, the mystical powers which drive him off the true path to perfection. Only a *sadguru* can restore him to the true path.

The other story was that Sayin Baba had four brothers, one of whom used to go out, beg, and bring cooked food, bread and corn. His wife used to give out just enough for their father and mother but starved all the brothers. Sayin Baba then got a contract, brought the money home and everyone was supplied with food including the well-to-do brother. Later on the brother got leprosy. Everyone shunned him. The father turned him out. Then Sayin Baba used to feed him and see to his comforts; ultimately the brother died."

Meaning : Irrespective of the attitude of others to him, a seeker should remember that his relations with others are a result of *karmic* links of the past lives and he should be loving and considerate to them.

"Sayin Baba (later) immersed in care, gazed steadily at the east and west and dismissed us all with the usual words 'Go to the wada'…."

19-1-1912 : "I was aroused for *kakad arti* by Bapusaheb Jog. Dikshit told me that Megha died about 4.00 a.m. The *kakad arti* was done, but Sayin Maharaj did not show his face clear and did not appear to open his eyes. He never threw glances spreading grace. After we returned, arrangements were made for the cremation of Megha's body. Sayin Baba came just as the body was being brought out and loudly lamented his death. His voice was so touching that it brought tears to every eye. He followed the body up to the bend in the main road near the village and then went his usual way. Megha's body was taken under the *bata* (banyan) tree and consigned to flames there. Sayin Baba could be distinctly heard lamenting his death even at that distance and he was seen waving his hand and swaying, as if in *arti*, to say goodbye (to the departed soul). There was a good supply of dry fuel and the flames (of the pyre) soon rose very high. Dixit, Kaka, myself, Bapu Saheb Jog, Upasani, Dadakelkar and all others were there and praised the lot of Megha that his body was seen and touched by Sayin Baba on the head, heart, shoulders, and feet. After finishing the ceremonies we ought to have sat praying, but Bapusaheb Jog came and I sat talking with him. When later on I went to see Sayin Baba he asked me how I spent the afternoon. I was very sorry to confess that I had wasted it in talking. This was a lesson to me. I remember how Sayin Baba foretold his (i.e., Megha's) death three days ago saying 'This is the last *arti* of Megha', and how Megha too felt that he completed his service and was passing away, how he shed tears to think that he could not see Sathe whom he regarded as his *guru*, and how he directed that the cows of Sayin Baba should be let loose. He never expressed any other wish".

3-2-1912 : "I was late in getting up and it appeared that there was a wave of laziness. Bapusaheb Jog was late, so was Mr. Dixit and nearly everybody else. After finishing my prayer I went to the *musjid* but Sayin Baba told me to take *udi* without entering it".

7-3-1912 : "I attended the *kakad arti*. Sayin Maharaj was in a pleased mood and danced as he left the *chavadi* and went towards the *musjid*."

Coming back to our review of Baba's daily routine: On their arrival at the mosque Fasle fetched a bucketful of water and helped Baba to wash his mouth and face. Then Baba sat quiet for a long time, gazing at the sacred fire. Then the leper Bhaghoji removed the bandage on Sai's hand, applied *ghee* (or clarified butter) to it and massaged it. Finally he bandaged the hand again with a

new cloth. This part of the routine was started ever since Baba suddenly thrust his hand into the fire one day, to save a devotee's child in a far away village (when it slipped into the furnace from its mother's lap). Even long after the burn was healed, Baba waited everyday for Bhaghoji to continue the service, but he never explained the reason for it to anyone.

We can have a chance guess at it. Devotees like Bhaghoji who constantly lived at Shirdi while Baba was in flesh and blood were everyday reminded and reassured of Baba's supreme spiritual state by the countless miraculous experiences of devotees which they had witnessed. The presence of the Godman switches the devotee's mind to a higher pitch of concentration on Him, warding off all other distractions, or mental sloth. But as he moves out of the Godman's presence, all his human frailties return and, for however short a while, makes him forget the Godman's greatness. How often did Christ chide his followers as of "little faith"! So the period of the most intense *sadhana* for a devotee is that of personal service to the Perfect One – if at all he gets a chance. Thus Baba encouraged Bhaghoji to undertake that service so that punctually, at that hour, and for the fixed while, unfailingly Bhaghoji keenly felt Baba's presence in his mind. Baba graced him with intense *sadhana*. It was not Sai's hand that Bhaghoji massaged and dressed but it is his own spirit, his own devotion to Baba so that his own crippled self might become perfect "even as the Father in heaven is perfect".

At 7.30 a.m. Baba went out on his first round of *bhiksha* or begging. On returning to the mosque, Baba offered the first morsel to the sacred fire *"dhuni"* and then ate the rest.

At 9 a.m. Baba left for Lendi. It is to be noted here that it was only when he went to the Lendibaugh (or the garden) that he wore his shoes. (These shoes are now preserved by the Samsthan as sacred relics). On all his other ramblings he went about bare-footed. When Baba started for Lendi all the devotees followed him. A ceremonial umbrella (*chatra*) was held over his head all along the way. It was at one of these processions that Baba was once photographed with his devotees. The devotee on his left is Gopalrao Booty the millionaire of Nagpur; Nana Saheb Nimonkar is on the right side and Bhaghoji Sindhe is the one who is seen holding the *chatra* (umbrella) in that photograph. When the party approached Lendibaugh, Baba entered the garden alone and never allowed anyone to go inside. He stayed there for more than an hour and a half. What he did inside for such a long time remained a mystery. We now know it from Abdul's account cited earlier.

Baba returned from the garden to the mosque about half past ten. There he was awaited by professional dancers, musicians, and others who approached him for blessings and for money. When Baba assumed his seat, they presented their skills before him till noon. Devotees gathered there. Baba spoke to them till the noon *arti*. G.S. Khaparde gives us an intimate picture of these gatherings in his "Shirdi Diary" :

11-12-1910 : "We went to Sayin Saheb as usual and today, conversation was both important and marked by two incidents. Sayin Maharaj said that he used to sit in a corner and desired to exchange the lower part of his body with that of a parrot. The exchange came and he did not realize for a year that he had lost one lakh of rupees. Then he began to sit near a post and then a great serpent woke up and was very angry. It used to jump up and fall from above."

Meaning : Parrot is, proverbial for lust. Baba exchanging the nether half of his body with its body indicates that he had succumbed to the demands of the flesh. The lakhs of rupees he had lost indicates that he had lost all the spiritual power he had accumulated by earlier *sadhana*. The pillar stands for the spine and sitting at its foot symbolizes meditating on the base of the spine or *muladhara*. The jumping snake is the awakened *kundalini* or the "serpent power".

"Then Baba changed the subject apparently and said that he visited a place and the Patil there would not let him go unless he made a plantation and a hard foot-path through it. He said he completed both."

Meaning : God is the land-lord or Patil. Raising the plantation signifies the foundation of a spiritual centre. The foot-path stands for the spiritual path which Baba had to lay for his devotees. The parable indicates that God has ordered Baba to play the role of a *guru*. It is interesting to note that Baba did raise a garden at the spot where now stands the *samadhi mandir* which is the beacon light to innumerable spiritual seekers.

"Some people came in at this time. To the man he said, 'You have nobody but me to look after you'. Looking round, he added (regarding a woman) that she was a relation of his and had married the Rohillas who looted the man. Then he said that the world is bad. People were not as they were before. Formerly they used to be pious and trustful. Now they are unbelieving and disposed to contemplate evil; then he added something which I could not catch. It was something about his father, grandfather and his becoming the one and the other alternately. Now as to the incidents: Mr.Dixit brought fruits. Sayin Saheb ate some and was distributing the rest.
Balasaheb, *mamlatdar* of this *taluka* was there and said that Sayin Maharaj was giving away only fruits of one kind. My son told his friend Mr.Patwardhan that Sayin Maharaj accepted or refused fruits in proportion to the devotion with which they were offered. This made a little noise and Sayin Maharaj looked at me with an eye that blazed wonderfully and sparkled at me with anger. He demanded what I said. I replied that I was saying nothing and that children were talking with each other. He looked at my son and Patwardhan and changed the mood immediately. Towards the close Balasaheb Mirikar remarked that Sayin Maharaj was talking all through to Haribhau Dixit".

12-12-1910 : "Mr.Dixit appears to have turned a new leaf altogether and (he) spends a good deal of his time in prayer, and his temper which was always mild appears to have acquired the peculiar sweetness which is entirely due to inner peace…

"We all went to see Sayin Saheb later on. I was a bit late and missed a very interesting story told by him. He teaches in parables. It was about a man having a very beautiful horse which, do what he could, would not go in pair. It was taken all round and given all the usual training, to no purpose. At last a *vidwan* (learned man) suggested its being taken to the place from which it was originally brought. This was done and then the horse went alright in the harness and became very useful."

Meaning : The horse stands for mind which is difficult to harness and unite with a chosen object of meditation. Taking it to its original place signifies investigating the source of mind when it naturally gets stilled.

"I heard a fragment of the parable. Then he enquired when I was going (home). I replied that I would go when he gave me permission of his own accord. He replied, "You go today after taking your meal" and later on sent curds by the hands of Mahdava Rao Deshpande as *prasad* to me. I had it at meal, and soon after it, went to Sayin Saheb. He confirmed his permission to go as soon as I want. My son did not feel sure of the permission and so asked expressly and the permission was given in clear words. Sayin Maharaj today asked *dakshina* of others, but nothing of me or my son. I was very low in funds and he appeared to know it". (Khaparde left Shirdi that day. He again returned for a long stay there on 6-12-1911.)

6-12-1911: "I went with Madhava Rao to pay respects to Sayin Maharaj and saluted him from a distance. He was washing his hands and feet at the time. Later on we went to him in company and sat near him in the *musjid*. He told us a story of his having been with a *fakir* who was fond of good food. This *fakir* was invited to dinner and he went with Sayin Maharaj. At the time of their starting *fakir*'s wife asked Sayin Maharaj to bring some food from the feast (for her) and gave a pot for the purpose. The *fakir* ate so well that he decided to sleep at the place. Sayin Maharaj returned with the food, tying up the cakes to his back and carrying the liquid in the pot on his head. He found the way very long, lost his way, sat near a *mangwada* (the colony of 'low' caste people) to rest for a while. The dogs began to bark and he got up and returned to his village and made over the cakes and liquid to the *fakir's* wife. By that time the *fakir* also returned and they had a very good feed together. He added, "It is very difficult to find a good *fakir*."

9-12-1911 : "I went to the *musjid* and sat long, listening to the things said there. Sayin Maharaj was in a pleasant mood. I took my *hukka* (smoking kit) there and Sayin Maharaj had a smoke out of it. He looked wonderfully beautiful at *arti* time, but dismissed every one very soon after it. He said he would come to dine with us. He calls my wife 'Ajibai'. On returning to our lodging we learnt that Mr.Dixit's daughter who was ill passed away. The deceased dreamt a few days ago that Sayin Maharaj kept her under the neem tree here. Sai Maharaj also said yesterday that the girl was dead. We sat talking about the sad event. The child was only seven years old. I went and saw her mortal remains. They were very beautiful and the expression on her face after death was peculiarly charming. It reminded me of the picture of Madonna that I saw in England".

11-12-1911 : "We visited Sayin Maharaj both as he went out and after he returned. He gave me *chilim* (smoking pipe) very often and grapes that Radhakrishnabai had sent. He gave the grapes twice to my son Balwant. In the afternoon I heard that he was cleaning the *musjid*. So I did not go there. All the people brought a deputation to Sayin Maharaj to get rid of the plague. He advised them to clean the roads, sweep the tombs, cremation and burial places and to feed the poor."

12-12-1911 : "After breakfast I lay down for a few minutes and then went with my people to the *musjid*. Sayin Maharaj was in a good mood and told (us) a story. Taking up a fruit lying there he asked me how many fruits it was capable of producing. I replied, 'As many times thousands as there were seeds in it'. He smiled very pleasantly and added that it obeyed laws of its own. He

told how there was a girl, very good and pious, how she served him, and prospered".

19-12-1911 : "He said there was a rich man who had five sons and a daughter. These children effected a division of the family property. Four of the sons took their shares of movables and immovables. The fifth son and the daughter could not take possession of their share. They wandered about hungry, came to Sayin Baba. They had six carts laden with jewels. Robbers took away two of them. The remaining four were kept under the banyan tree."

Meaning : The father is ego or *jiva*. The five sons are the five senses. Mind is the daughter. Fifth son is the sense of smell i.e., breath. The rest of the four senses are attached to their objects. Mind and breath which are perturbed had both sought Baba's succour. Yet the jewel-laden carts were stolen by the weakness of the other senses. The passions associated with the other senses are the robbers. The jewel-laden carts symbolize the six aspects of *sadhana* or *sadhana shatka*. Banyan tree symbolizes *samsara*, the perennial tree of phenomenal manifestation. The parable shows that it is not enough if only a few senses of the seeker and a few of his passions are under control.

21-12-1911 : "I got up as usual, prayed, and sat talking with Darvesh Saheb. He said he had a vision (dream) in which he saw three girls and a blind woman knocking at his door; they told him that they had come to amuse themselves; he ordered them out on pain of being kicked and began a prayer; he then blessed all in the room and in the house and the whole village. He told me to ask Sayin Saheb (for the significance of the dream). When I went to see the latter (i.e. Baba) on his return to the *musjid*, before I was fairly seated, Sayin Saheb commenced a story. He said that he was beaten last night by something on his private parts and hands, that he applied oil, wandered about, had a stool, and then felt better near the fire. I shampooed his legs and on my return told the story to Darvesh Saheb. The answer was clear."

24-12-1911 :"A lady by name Anusuyabai appeared to be spiritually advanced; Sayin Maharaj treated her with great consideration and gave her four fruits. Later on he told the story of a man having five sons. Four of them demanded and obtained partition. Two of these four decided to unite with the father. The latter ordered the mother to poison one of these two and she obeyed. The other fell from a tall tree, got injured and was on the point of death, but was allowed by the father to survive for about twelve years, until a son and daughter were born to him and then he died. Sayin Baba said nothing about the fifth son and to me the story looks incomplete".

Meaning : God is the father, *prakriti* or *maya* is the mother. The five sons are the ego, *buddhi*, *manas*, *chitta* and body. The son ego or *ahamkara* had perished. The discriminating the illusionary mind that veils the Spirit got subdued; and hence it could beget the two children, devotion and wisdom. So nothing remains to be said of the body which is then realized to be unreal from the absolute point of view.

25-12-1911 : "My son Balwant had a dream last night in which he thought he saw Sayin Maharaj and Mr.Bapusaheb Jog in our Elichpur house. He offered food to Sayin Baba. He told me about the dream and I thought it was a mere fancy, but today he (Baba) called Balwant and said, 'I went to your house yesterday and you fed me but gave no *dakshina*. You should give twenty-five rupees now. So Balwant returned to the lodgings and went with Madhava Rao Deshpande and

paid the *dakshina* (offering of money). At midday *arti*, Sayin Maharaj gave me *prasad* of *peda*, fruits, and made a distinct sign to me to make a bow. I at once prostrated myself."

1-1-1912 : "He (Upasani's brother) went to see Sayin Maharaj and was told (by Baba) about people bringing ties with them from a former birth and meeting now in consequence of them. He (Baba) told the story of a former birth in which he (Baba), Bapusaheb Jog, Dada Kelkar, Madhav Rao Deshpande, myself and Dixit were associated and lived in a blind alley. There was his *murshid* (*guru*) there. He (Sai) has now brought us together again…. I sat reading again and then went to the *musjid*. Baba first dismissed me along with the rest, but called me again, saying that I was anxious to run away."

7-1-1912 : "The midday *arti* was late. Sayin Baba commenced a very good tale. He said he had a good well. The water in it was sky blue, and its supply was inexhaustible. Four *motas* (i.e., bailing buckets) could not empty it and the fruit grown with the water was very pure and tasty. He did not continue the story beyond this point."

Meaning : Well is the spiritual heart, the pure water is the *chidakash*, the spiritual expanse within, the inexhaustible source of bliss. Four buckets are the four *purusharthas* or objects of man's endeavours: righteousness, wealth, fulfillment of needs and salvation.

8-1-1912 : "During the midday service after the *arti* Sayin Maharaj exhibited suddenly great anger and abused violently. It appears as if plague is likely to appear here and Sayin Maharaj is endeavouring to prevent its reappearance."

12-1-1912 : "We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned to the *musjid*. He was very gracious and repeatedly made me smoke out of his pipe. It solved many of my doubts and I felt delighted. He was very kind to Balwant, sent for him and let him spend the whole of the afternoon with him."

14-1-1912 : "I went to the *musjid* after he returned and found that he was arranging for a bath ….. In the afternoon when I went Sayin Baba did not admit anybody… When Sayin Maharaj went out he asked me how I spent the morning, which was a mild rebuke for (my) not having read and contemplated. I went to see him again when he returned and he was very kind. He commenced a long story and kept on as if speaking to me but I felt sleepy all the time and did not understand anything of the story. I was told afterwards that the story was a very thinly veiled recital of the events that actually happened in the life of one Gupte."

16-1-1912 : "I was able to see Sayin Maharaj go out but was late in going to see him after he returned to the *musjid*. He not only showed no displeasure, but treated me with positive kindness and I sat serving." (That is because Mr.Khaparde spent his time in prayer and in listening to "*Paramamrit*", a celebrated Marathi work on *vedanta*.)

17-1-1912 : "We saw Sayin Maharaj go out again after he returned to the *musjid*. He gave me silent instructions but like a fool I did not understand them."

18-1-1912 : "We saw Sayin Baba….. He treated me very kindly and while I was serving, he told me two or three tales. He said, many people came to take his money. He never resisted but let them take it away. He only noted their names and followed them. When they got down for their meals he killed them and brought his money back."

Meaning : This parable describes the attentive watching of the mental processes which leads to quieting the mind and regaining of calm meditation. One-pointedness of mind, dispassion, control of senses, etc., are the wealth. Desires born of various modes like *rajas* and *thamas*, are the thieves.

"The other story was that there was a blind man. He used to live near the *takia* here. A man enticed away his wife and eventually murdered the blind man. Four hundred men assembled at the *chavadi* and condemned him. They ordered him to be decapitated. This order was carried out by the village hangman who did the work out of some motive and not merely as a piece of his duty. So the murdered man was re-born as the son of the hang man. Sai then commenced another tale. In the meantime a stranger, a *fakir*, came and touched Sayin Baba's feet. Sayin Baba felt very angry, or rather showed that he was so and shook off the *fakir* who showed great tenacity and persistence without losing his own equanimity. At last he went out and stood near the
compound wall outside. Sayin Baba was angry and threw away the *arti* utensils and dishes full of food brought by his worshippers. He lifted up one Ram Maruthi Bua who (later) declared that he felt very happy, as if sent to higher regions. One Bhagya and a village boy were also roughly handled by Sayin Maharaj. During the torrent of hard words he said that he had saved my son Balwant and then often repeated the phrase '*Fakir* wishes to kill Dada Saheb (meaning me) but I would not permit it.' He mentioned one more name but I cannot recall it now …. When *arti* was begun Baba even moved out of his place resumed it before it was finished. He was not really angry, of course, and did the whole thing as a *leela* (divine play)."

20-1-1912 : "We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned. He sat chatting pleasantly. Presently, a *jagirdar* of a nearby village came and Sayin Baba would not let him approach, much less worship him. Many people interceded for him in vain. Appa Kote came and did his utmost to secure at least the usual kind of *puja* for the *jagirdar* and Sayin Baba relented
so far as to let him enter the *musjid* and worship the pillar near the fire – place but he would not give *udi*."

22-1-1912 : "During the course of worship he (Sayin Baba) put two flowers in his two nostrils and put two others between his ears and on the head … I thought, this was an instruction. Sayin Baba repeated the same thing second time and when interpreted it a second time in my mind, he offered the *chillim* (smoking pipe) to me and this confirmed me. He said something which I particularly wished to remember but it went clear out of my mind and no efforts made all through the day could bring it back. I am most surprised at this as this is the first experience of the kind. Sayin Baba also said that his order was supreme (*bala*), which I understood to mean that I need not be anxious about the health of my son."

24-1-1912 : "Lakshmibai Kaujalgi attended our *'Paramamrit'* class and went to the *musjid* after I reached there. Sayin Baba called her his mother-in-law and made a joke about her saluting him. This gave me the idea that she has been accepted by him as his disciple."

Meaning : Her mind is the daughter of her soul which she surrendered to Baba and hence she is his mother-in-law.

29-1-1912 : "I did not get up till 12.30 or 1 p.m. Madhavarao Deshpande and others tried to awaken me for the *arti* but I did not respond. They went to the *arti* and somehow the matter reached the ears of Sayin Saheb and he said that he would awaken me. Somehow I got up as the *arti* was being finished and attended the closing portion of it."

7-2-1912 : "I found Sayin Maharaj sitting and, in the yard, a man was exhibiting tricks taught by him to a monkey. There was also a professional singer and dancer. She had a good voice and she rendered religious songs.

9-2-1912 : "Sayin Baba was in a very good mood. The young boy whom we call *'Pishya'* came there. Sayin Saheb said that Pishya was a Rohilla in his previous birth, a very good man that he prayed long and once came as a guest to Sayin Saheb's grand-father. The latter had a sister who used to live separately. Sayin Saheb was a young boy himself then and he playfully suggested that the Rohilla should marry her. Later he did so. The Rohilla lived there with his wife for a long time and ultimately went away with her, nobody knew where. He died and Sayin Saheb put him in the womb of the present mother. Pishya, he said, would be very fortunate and (be) the protector of thousands. …"

"During midday *arti*, Sayin Saheb said something to one Shivanand Sastry and made signs. The Sastry unfortunately did not catch their import. Sayin Saheb made signs to Bapusaheb Jog also."

4-3-1912 : "My wife was late in going to worship Sayin Saheb but he very kindly desisted from his meal and let her worship him."

Thus at 12, noon-*arti* was performed. During the *arti* though a silver throne was kept for him in the mosque. Baba ever sat on his sack cloth on the floor, leaving the silver chair vacant. The devotee Radhakrishna Mai hung a garland of bangles as a decoration to the entrance of the mosque. *Nivedana* or offering of food was brought before *arti* was commenced. After *arti* Bapusaheb Jog distributed *burfi* near the neem tree to all the devotees.

After *arti*, Baba sat for meal. Everyday a large number of devotees gathered before the mosque with dishes of lunch to be offered to him as *naivedya*, before they took it. Usually Baba touched the dishes with his hand and gave them back. But occasionally he took a morsel out of one of them. Baba never had his lunch alone. Quite a number of his intimate devotees dined with him there in the *musjid*. For instance, Baba never lunched without Bade Baba sitting by his side. Others were also there. Tatya Patil, Ramachandra Patil and Bhayyaji Patil sat on the left side of Baba. On the right side sat Bade Baba, Madhavrao Deshpande (alias Shama), Booty and Kakasaheb Dixit. In the mango season Baba daily took one fruit at lunch, just tasted it and gave the rest away to the others. Just before everyone started eating, Baba mixed one seer of milk, one seer of sugar and one seer of *rotis* together in a bowl and distributed it to all as *prasad* (consecrated food).

Late Sri M.V.Pradhan describes this part of Baba's daily routine thus :

"Ever since my first visit, I was having my dinner at the mosque with Baba. Baba with his own hand stuffed the food into our plates and cups in large quantity. Instead of throwing away such a valuable *prasad* I asked my niece to come up and take away about three-fourths of what was served to me, and that sufficed to feed my family. Yet what I ate warded off all hunger or appetite for a night meal. Baba almost invariably gave dessert (i.e. fruit etc.) at the end of the meal. But when I went up with Babu, Baba noticed that Babu did not care for cooked food and served mangoes and fruits first, so that Babu might have a full meal. When other children were born, I would take three children with me including Babu, to the mosque to dine with Baba."

By the time everyone in the mosque finished his meal, many more that waited outside for the *prasad*, were given the same. Then Sagun Meru Naik cleaned the mosque by removing the remnants of lunch and scrubbing the floor. Baba again sat in his usual place when Sagun Meru Naik gave him betel to chew. At the end of it he gave a tumbler of water, which Baba drank. Then the latter used to receive the daily *dakshina* of Rs.2/- from Sagun Meru Naik.

After an interval of two hours all the visitors assembled in the mosque after their siesta. Parties of visiting artists too presented their skill before Baba. These included *Haridasas*, *Puraniks*, circus people and *bahurupis* (a type of fancy dress) and Baba gave away Rs.2/- per individual at the end of their performances. Among the devotees were some, like Lakshman Shimpe, who took illegal commissions from Baba's gifts while distributing the same. Baba never reprimanded them but kept quiet.

After sometime Baba walked all over the frontyard of the mosque. At the end of the walking he invariably stood at one spot near the wall of the mosque and sometimes chatted with those that passed along the road. Very often his words were cryptic. For instance, once he said, "Ten serpents have gone. Many more will come"; "People will flock here like ants" "*Wani* (the merchant) and *teli* (the oil vendor) have troubled me much; I won't stay in *Dwaraka Mai* for long; I will go away from here." Sometimes such was the emotional fervour that he would start

to leave immediately. On such occasions Tatya would rush to him, leaving all the work, and pacify him saying that he (Tatya) would punish all those who troubled him (Baba), and that he would not allow Baba to go away from Shirdi. "Let us not go today, Baba", Tatya would often say "We'll go some time after. Please be pacified for the present." It cannot be explained why Baba behaved like that but it is strange that none except Tatya dared to approach Baba when he seemed upset. Then Baba would quietly resume his seat and chat with devotees as if nothing had happened, or sometimes he would go out for his evening stroll. Either before his walk in the frontyard of the mosque or after that, the kind of talk that went on in the mosque can be seen from "Shirdi Diary".

7-12-1910 : "We, Balasaheb, Sahasrabudhe, my son Babu, Bapusaheb Jog and children went together and sat there in the *musjid*. Then Sayin Maharaj turned to me an said, 'This world is funny. All are my subjects. I look upon all equally, but some become thieves and what can I do for them? People who are themselves very near to death desire and contrive the death of others. They offend me a great deal but I say nothing. I keep quiet God is very great and has his officers everywhere. They are all-powerful … One must be content with the state in which God keeps him. I am (also) very powerful … I was here eight or ten thousand years ago.' My son asked him to tell him the story as he had promised earlier, about three brothers who went to a *musjid*. One of them wished to go out and beg. The others did not want him to do so, on the ground that the food obtained by begging would be impure and would pollute their *chowka*. The third brother replied that if the food spoil the *chowka*, his leg should be cut off etc., etc. Sayin Maharaj said it was a very good story. (He said) He could tell another when he was in the humour. My son said he did not know when the thing would happen, and if the humour recurred after he left Shirdi, there would not be much use. There upon Sayin Baba told him that he should rest assured that the story would be told before he left. I asked him why he was angry yesterday, and he replied that it was because the *teli* said something. Then I asked why he cried out, "Do not beat, do not beat", today at the time of the distribution of food. He replied that he cried out because the Patil's family was quarrelling and were divided among themselves. Sayin Saheb spoke with such a wonderful sweetness and smiled so often and with such extraordinary grace that the conversation will always remain engraved in my memory. Unfortunately other people came and the conversation was interrupted. We were so sorry for it but it could not be helped."

8-12-1910: "Later on we went to see him in the afternoon but had to turn back as he was washing his feet…" Later we went again, but Sayin Saheb dismissed us very soon. So we returned. He appeared very much engaged in thinking out something … a police officer, I believe, a Head Constable … was charged with extracting money and (was) tried by the court of sessions. He vowed to visit Sayin Maharaj if he was acquitted and so he came to fulfill his vow. On seeing him Sayin Maharaj appeared affected and said, "Why did you not stay there for a few more days? The poor people must have felt disappointed." He repeated this twice. We learnt afterwards that the gentleman's friends pressed him to stay and that he did not comply with their request. He had never seen Sayin Saheb before and of course the latter could not have seen him before. The wonder is how Sayin Maharaj knew him and said what he did."

8-12-1911: "I saw Sayin Maharaj once more in the afternoon. Looking at me, he said *'Ka Sarkar?'* ('How now, landlord!') then he gave me general advice that I should live as God keeps me and added that a man fond of his family has to endure many things .. etc., and told the story

of a rich man who starved till evening, cooked for himself and ate a very rough bread, all on account of a temporary difficulty."

10-12-1911 : "I made two attempts to see Sayin Maharaj in the afternoon, but he was not in the mood to see anybody … there is one Gokhale from Narsoba's *wadi*. He says he was (mystically) directed to see Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaon and Sayin Maharaj … Sayin Maharaj this afternoon prepared some medicine which he took."

13-12-1911 : "About 4 p.m., I went with Balwant, Bhishma and Bandu who brought my hukka and Sayin Maharaj had a smoke of it. Madhavarao asked for permission for me to return to Amraoti but Sayin Maharaj said that he would decide about it tomorrow morning. He got all the people there out of the *musjid* and advised me very kindly in a truly fatherly way."

14-12-1911 : "Sayin Maharaj said that I could go tomorrow or so and added that I should serve God alone and no one else. He said, "What God gives is never exhausted and what man gives never lasts!"

16-12-1911 : "Madhavarao Deshpande asked for (Baba's) permission for me (to return home), and Sayin Maharaj said I might go the day after, or a month hence."

17-12-1911 : "Towards evening I went to *musjid* but Sayin Maharaj asked me and my companions to bow from a distance. He however called my son Balwant near and told him to bring *dakshina*. We all saluted him opposite the *chavadi*."

18-12-1911 : "He (Sayin Maharaj) said I had filled my bucket, was enjoying the cool breeze of the neem tree and was enjoying myself while he was enduring all manner of trouble and had no sleep. He was in a very pleasant mood….."

19-12-1911 : "Sayin Baba this afternoon went out towards Nimgaon, visited Dengle, cut a tree and came back; many went after him with musical instruments and escorted him home."

20-12-1911 : "Darvesh Saheb told me that Sayin Baba saw him at night and granted his wish. I mentioned this to Sayin Maharaj and he said nothing. I today shampooed the legs of Sayin Maharaj. The softness of his limbs is wonderful."

22-12-1911 : "Sayin Maharaj was particularly pleasant-looking and went quietly to Musjid. Darvesh Saheb made an attempt to go (home) today but Sayin Maharaj did not give the necessary permission. (Later) Darvesh Saheb got ill and had fever. One Tipnis is staying here with his wife. She is ill and Dr. Hathe has been doing all he can for her. She had a fit in the evening but it turned out to be an obsession by a spirit. Dixit, Madhavarao Deshpande and others went to see her. She is possessed by the former owner of the house in which she lives and by two *mahars* ('low' castes). The owner declared that he would have killed her but Sayin Baba ordered him not to. The *mahars* are also kept away by Sayin Baba. When Tipnis threatened to move his wife to this *wada* the spirits prayed earnestly and asked him not to do so as Baba would beat them. Later Tipnis changed his lodging and his wife is better."

23-12-1911 : "Darvesh Saheb had obtained permission to return. He is obviously very much advanced spiritually as Sayin Maharaj came as far as the breach in the wall to see him off … Mr.Mahajani came today and brought very good fruits and globes of glass for Sayin Baba's lamps. Mr.Govardhandas of Bhayandar is also here. He brought very good fruits, silk curtains for Sayin Maharaj's improved room in the *chavadi* and new dress for the volunteers who carry the (ceremonial) umbrella, *chamars* and fans. There was a little meaningless disagreement between Madhav rao Deshpande and my wife about living in the Dixit's *wada*. Sayin Baba said that the *wada* belonged to himself, and neither to Dixit nor to Madhavarao."

26-12-1911 : "We saw Sayin Maharaj in the afternoon. He was very gracious. Today he spoke with my son Balwant and got him to sit (there) even after he told everybody to clear out. He told him not to admit any guest in the evening and to take care of him (Sayin), and that in return he would take care of him."

21-1-1912 : "After the *arti* Sayin Baba followed the usual custom of using harsh words against the internal enemies by naming them as Appa Kote, Teli, Waman Tatya, etc."

5-2-1912 : "We saw Sayin Sahib … He was very kind to me, said a few words, and in dismissing the company after *arti*, called me by name, told me to shake off my sloth, and look after all the ladies and children. Mrs. Laxmibai Kaujalgi was given a piece of bread and told to go and eat it with Radha Krishnabai. This is a great good fortune. She will be happy hereafter."

6-2-1912 : "Fakir Baba appears to have asked (Baba) about my going away and Sayin Baba answered that I told him that I would go tomorrow. When my wife spoke about going, Sayin Baba said that I did not ask him for permission personally. So he would not say (anything). I happened to go there soon after and Sayin Baba said that I could not go away without taking from Dada Bhat Rs.500/- and Rs.200/- from someone else and making them all over to him".

10-2-1912 : "Sayin Baba was in a very pleasant mood and said that his body has been severed from his legs (downwards), that he could raise up the former, but not the latter. He said he had a fight with the *teli* (oil vendor), that when he was young he raised money for family purposes and agreed to serve the creditor to repay him, but he found he could not work; so he applied marking nut (*anacardium*) to his eyes and another irritant (*shar*) to his body and became ill. He was laid up for a year, but as soon as he recovered, he worked night and day and paid off the debt."

13-2-1912 : "Sayin Maharaj gave me *udi* as soon as I stepped in. So I exclaimed that it was telling me to go away. There upon he said, 'Who tells you to go? Sit down.' Then he sat talking pleasantly and said, The cow now possessed by Mr.Dixit belonged originally to Mahalsapathy; then it went to Aurangabad; then to Jalna and has now come back as the property of Dixit. God knows whose property it is."

15-2-1912 : "Baba was in a pleased mood and said that he had laboured very hard, had gone without food for months, fed on leaves of *kala takal*, *nimb* and other trees. He said God was very good to him, for life never became extinct, though all flesh got wasted and bones appeared to be in danger of crumbling away… My wife and others wished to go to Kopergaon tomorrow for (holy) *Sivaratri* festival. Sayin Saheb thought it was unnecessary, but they persisted and

ultimately got his permission in a way."

29-2-1912 : "He said that Balasahib Bhate was a *khatri* (the warrior caste or *kshatriya*), that his wife was a *salin* i.e., a weaver, and that his son Babu was also a *salin*. (i.e., in their earlier births). Sayin Saheb further said that Vasudeva Kaka was a Rajput in his former birth and bore the name of Jaisingh and that he was fond of meat and that Sayin Saheb and others used to provoke him by asking him if he wanted the head of a goat, that this Jaisingh had three sons who served in the army and a daughter who turned out bad, became the keep of a barber, bore three children by him and died there."

3-3-1912 : "Abdullah, in trying to remove a hanging lamp, accidentally dropped it to the ground and it got shattered. I thought that this might anger Sayin Baba but it did not. He took no notice of it. He said that in a former birth I was with him for two or three years and went into royal service though there was enough at home to live in comfort. I wished to learn further particulars but Sayin Saheb would not communicate them."

6-3-1912 : "I sat serving him. He said he felt as if tied fast at the waist, chest and near the neck, that he thought *nagavely* leaves were put on his eyes and on opening them to find out what the matter was, he was surprised to see something which he could not understand. He caught a leg of it and then lay it down. He tried to light his fire but the fuel being not quite dry would not ignite. He thought he saw four dead bodies being removed and could not understand whose they were. Sayin Saheb kept on speaking in the same strain saying that his upper and lower jaws were very painful and that he could not even drink water."

In the evening, Pilaji Gurave, the owner of a *marvari* shop, used to stand in front of the mosque and play on his *shehnai*. Baba rushed at him in a rage saying, 'He is abusing me!' Pilaji would dodge him and, standing at a little distance, he would play on. Baba would cool down in a little while and walk to and fro between the *chavadi* and the mosque on the road. Pilaji never stopped playing on his *shehnai* each day at this hour. In the evening there was *arti* again at 6 p.m. The daily activity of Baba about this time can be seen from Khaparde's notes in his 'Dairy' :-

30-12-1911 : We went to Sayin Maharaj a little before dusk. He treated me very kindly, called me by name and narrated a small tale calculated to impress the virtue of patience. He said he went to Aurangabad in one of his wanderings and saw a *fakir* sitting in a *musjid* near which there was a very tall tamarind tree. The *fakir* did not allow him to enter the *musjid* at first but ultimately consented to his putting up in it. The *fakir* depended entirely on a piece of cake which an old woman used to supply him with at midday. Sayin Maharaj volunteered to beg for him and kept him supplied amply with food for twelve years and then thought of leaving the place. The old *fakir* shed tears at parting and had to be consoled with soft words. Sayin Maharaj visited him four years later and found him there doing well. The *fakir* then came here a few years ago and lodged at the *chavadi*. Mother Baba, looked after him well. From what he said I gathered that Sayin Baba stayed twelve years to instruct the Aurangabad *fakir* and set him up fully in the spiritual world."

4-1-1912 : "After 5 p.m., I went to Sayin Maharaj in the *musjid* and found him walking about in the compound. My wife also came here. After a time he took his usual seat and we sat near him."

6-1-1912 : "In the evening there was the usual *wada arti* and later on we attended the *shej arti* at the *chavadi*. Sayin Maharaj was in an exceptionally pleased mood, made mystic signs to Megha, and did what are known as *drishtipata* (showering spiritual force by look) in *yoga*.

16-1-1912 : "Then we went to see Sayin Saheb at the *musjid* (at 4 p.m.). He did not permit us to sit long and came out himself and finished his usual stroll in a hurry and ordered us to return to the wada. We could not understand it, but on returning to the *wada* we learnt that Hari, a servant of Dixit who felt indisposed the other day died. We did the usual *arti* in the *wada* and attended the *shej arti*. Sayin Maharaj was particularly gracious at the latter and sent out wonderful currents of joy and instruction. He favoured Ram Maruthi similarly."

25-1-1912 : "In the evening stroll time Sayin Baba told me nearly the whole of the previous history of Laxmibai Kaujalgi. I knew it to be correct as I know the facts."

27-1-1912 : "Sayin Saheb's clothes were also washed by Radha Krishna Bai and he was angry with her for having done so."

30-1-1912 : "Sayin Baba asked me how I spent the afternoon. When I mentioned my writing letters, he smiled and said, 'It is better moving your hands than sitting idle!' "

31-1-1912 : "Sayin Saheb was in a pleased mood, talked pleasantly, danced and sang, and reminded me and others very strongly of what Lord Krishna did in Gokul."

1-2-1912 : "Before Sayin Baba started on his stroll, he told Mr.Dixit to give Rs.200/- to my wife who was then shampooing the legs of Sayin Saheb. The order was unaccountable. Has it come to this that I have to be maintained by charity? I prefer death to this. Sayin Saheb, I think, wished to curb and finally destroy my pride, so he is getting me used to poverty and the charity of others. Being omniscient, he knew everything including all my innermost thoughts and never insisted on the order being carried out. Now that my attention has been drawn to the matter, it appears to me that my wife then did not like the life of labour and poverty. Kakasaheb Dixit had accepted the life and was happy. So Sayin Maharaj asked him to give two hundred rupees, i.e., poverty and patience to my wife."

20-2-1912 : "Sayin Saheb told (us) two stories of which, do what I like, I cannot recall the first. I asked my wife and all those present and they also forgot, which is wonderful. The other story was that there was an old woman living with her son. He used to assist her in the disposal of the dead bodies in the village and get remuneration for it. There prevailed a sort of plague and many died. So his emoluments were very great. *Allah* met her one day and told her not to profit by the trade of her son. She spoke about it to her son but the latter paid no attention and he eventually died. The old woman then maintained herself by spinning cotton. *Allah* told her to go to the house of the relations of her husband, but she declined to do so. One day some brahmins came to purchase cotton from her, spied out all the details of her house and broke in at night. One of the burglars stood naked before her. She told him to run away as the town people would murder him for his crime. So the man ran away. Eventually the old woman died and was born as the daughter of the burglar. I am not quite sure that I understand the story right."

23-2-1912 : "He told me a story : when he was young, he went out one morning and suddenly became a girl and continued to be so for a time. He did not give many details…. Madhavarao asked Sayin Baba today about my return and got a reply to the effect that times being very unfavourable to me I would have to remain here a few more months."

26-2-1912 : "He told me a story of his brother having misbehaved once, and being outcasted in consequence. Sayin Baba looked after him and eventually had him re-admitted to the caste".

28-2-1912 : "He (Sayin Baba) asked me if *Jivamuni* would pay. I could not make out what *Jivamuni* meant but replied that he would (pay) if ordered. He said *Jivamuni* would not. He gave me a lot of fruits and sweets".

29-2-1912 : "After the *wada arti* I went to the *musjid* to attend the procession to *chavadi* and the *shej arti* there. Sayin Saheb exhibited anger, abused those that had got on the roof of the *musjid* for lighting lamps and at the time when the procession started he threw his stick at Mrs. Tai Jog, the wife of Bapusaheb. At the *chavadi* I thought he would beat Bapusaheb Jog for he approached the latter, held his hands and demanded why *arti* was done, but after a while he beat Bala Shimpe with his stick and later on (he beat) Triambak Rao whom he calls Maruti. Bala Shimpe ran away but Triambak Rao received the blow standing and prostrating before Sayin Maharaj. I think he received a full measure of favour and got at least a stage ahead (spiritually)".

At about 8 p.m., Baba commenced distribution of gifts of money. A large retinue of people regularly received alms at his hands and all these gathered in the frontyard of the mosque. Baba would thrust his hand into his pockets very quickly and strangely, precisely the amount he regularly paid to the particular recipient would come into his hands without the need for any counting. If it was a new recipient the money he really needed would come to Baba's hand. Baba gave the money gratis and never expected any work in return. Why he gave them no one knew.

One day Baba had nothing to give and he did not distribute money. One man insisted that he wanted money then and there. At last Baba thrust his hand into his empty pocket and picked out a few pieces of change and gave the man. The man left the place immediately.

To scrutinize the sources of Baba's income and to levy a tax, the British Government appointed an intelligencer. A Christian officer was specially chosen for the purpose for fear that a Hindu or a Moslem might very soon turn into a devotee of Baba and favour him. But this officer too failed to understand whence Baba got his amount. For even when the day's collections of dakshina from his devotees was not more than Rs.25/- he never gave away anything less than Rs.300/-. Instances of the regular distribution of Baba's money were as follows:

Bade Baba Rs.55/-; Tatya Rs.35/-; Jamle Musalmanin Rs.7/-; Bhayyaji Patil Kote Rs.4/-; Bhagoji – Rs.4/-; Ramachandra Patil – Rs.4/- and so on.

Besides, there were other sundry payments to others. Of the regular recipients of money, Ramachandra Patil used to give Baba four pieces of sugar candy in return for his payment. Whenever newly wedded couples of Shirdi visited him for his blessing, Baba invariably gave

them Rs.1/- each. This distribution of money went on every day till his *mahasamadhi*. During the *Ramnavami* celebrations he used to give two bundles of one-rupee notes to Dada Kelkar and Bade Baba, to be distributed to the poor after the celebration.

Similarly, the *naivedya* offered to him everyday by his devotees at the *Dwarakamai* was also given away to those who lived by it, *fakirs* and *bairagis* who lived in nearby hutments. To each of them Baba gave a quarter rupee per day. Later Baba left *Dwarakamai* for the *chavadi* in this usual pomp and eclat displayed by the procession of his devotees. He slept there for the night in the right wing of the *chavadi* which is now enclosed by railings and separated from the left wing where some of the devotees slept. On the days on which Baba slept in the mosque, Mahalsapathy invariably slept there with him.

When it was time for Baba to leave for *chavadi* the usual routine was as follows: Abdul and Radhakrishnamai removed, with their own hand, even the pig dung, swept the road and sprinkled it with water and drew ornamental designs (*rangoli*) on them in white. Then they spread a cloth all the way from the mosque to the *chavadi* for Baba to walk on. Then Tatya Patil came to the mosque and invited Baba to the *chavadi*. When Baba got ready to step down from the mosque Pilaji Gurave would begin to play on his shehnai. There were also a whole band of devotees that started *bhajan* (chorus chanting of devotional songs.) Then Shamsuddin (or Shyamakarna) the horse, went before Baba; behind the horse, the palanquin was carried by the devotees. Though the horse and the palanquin were offered to Baba for use he never mounted them but always walked behind them. Baba's shoes were placed in the palanquin. The ceremonial umbrella was held over his head as he walked towards the *chavadi*.

When he arrived at the corner of the *musjid*, Baba would stop there in front of the Hanuman temple and make mystic signs. Then he would proceed to *chavadi*.

On such days the night *arti* took place in the *chavadi*. *Artis* of saint Tukaram and saint Jnaneswar were sung first and finally the *arti* was sung to Sai Baba. When *arti* was sung to the glory of Tukaram and Jnaneswar, Baba sat in attention and did obeisance (*namaskar*) to them. After that

Baba rested there for the night. As there were too many mosquitoes, the devotees tried to fix up a mosquito-curtain for him. But Baba would not permit them. He got wild and threw it out more than once, when they forcibly fixed it up but finally he acquiesced. As his bedstead he used a gunny at first. Later on he used the clothes offered to him by devotees, a number of them, as his bed in the *chavadi*. If, in placing them the devotee overlooked a very slight fold in any one of them, Baba insisted on all the clothes being removed and the fold being set right. At about 9 p.m., Tatya Kote Patil used to get *naivedya* of *rotis* to Baba. Baba took a little of it. It was at this time that he gave Tatya his daily payment of Rs.35/-.

Early next morning, the same group of disciples brought him to the *Dwarakamai* in a procession with music and *bhajan* and left him there.

III

Baba's Estate

Everything is God's creation, and God's own. Yet He possesses nothing and covets nothing. On the other hand He lavishes all that is His on his creatures, though only a few can receive what He gives. Others have eyes but do not see; they have ears but do not hear; they have understanding yet do not consider. The greatness of a saint or prophet depends on how near he is to this aspect of God. And such God-men arise amidst us only to tell us to be perfect "even as the Father in heaven is perfect".

We have seen how Baba distributed huge amounts of money everyday to several people. How rich was he to do that ? What estate had he ? The dilapidated mosque was his palace; beggars were his courtiers; the ash of his *dhuni* was all his wealth; a tattered, long-sleeved shirt was his robe of honour. A brick which he always had with him was his pillow. The rough-hewn baton was his sceptre. The small piece of cloth around his head was his crown. The food he begged at five houses a day and his clay tobacco pipe were his only possessions. A few more of such articles he had. How and when he got all these is interesting to see so that those who dare might find the direction therein.

Baba had only one long-sleeved loose shirt, *kufni* at a time and it was very old and torn in many places. He personally used to patch it again and again at noon and wear the same. Once in a way he washed it in water, wearing a bright yellow dhoti at the time. He dried it by holding it over the dhuni and wore the same again. All the persuasion of devotees to put on a new *kufni* fell on deaf ears. Tatya who took great liberties with him used to tear the already tattered *kufni* further so as to compel Baba into accepting a new one. Finally he did succeed sometimes in making Baba accept one. Occasionally, say once in three or four months, he changed it and consecrated the old one to the holy fire. Very rarely he gave away his old shirt to a devotee as a token of grace, to be preserved as a memento.

Baba did not take his bath daily. But on some occasions he even bathed twice a day. A devotee kept a stone seat for Baba to sit on while bathing, but Baba never used it. He used to sit on the floor while bathing. This stone can be seen even today in the mosque.

At first, Sai Baba used a brick as a pillow and gunny was his bed. He slept with his hand on the brick under his cheek. Mahalsapathy pressed his feet daily at night. Whenever Mahalsapathy stopped pressing his legs by dozing, Baba woke him up saying, "Are you sleeping?" For years continuously Mahalsapathy never slept but kept awake, serving Baba like that. The latter did not allow Mahalsapathy to get down the steps of the *Dwarakamai* even to make water. Whenever he was about to go out, Baba used to stop him saying, "You'll die, don't get down!"

The most commonly seen photograph of Baba shows him sitting on a stone with his leg poised across the left knee. This stone is even today found in the frontyard of the mosque, just opposite to the *nimbar* or the niche in the main wall. Originally that stone was used by Madhav Fasle, Abdul Baba and other devotees to wash their clothes. Once Baba sat upon it. Henceforth the devotees stopped using it for that purpose. And the stone became an object of worship.

There is a neem-peepul (*Ficus-religiosa*) pair of trees grown together in Lendibaugh. When Baba visited Lendi, in the early days, one of the twin plants was very weak. Every day Baba twisted it vigorously in all directions and almost wrestled with it. Soon it grew strong. Today the tree is seen bent in nine ways and it is a thrill to remember that it was all his work.

Once when people complained of scarcity of water in Shirdi, Baba pointed out a plot of ground and asked them to sink a well there and assured them that water would be struck. Saguna Meru Naik, Kaka Dixit, Booty and others helped in the work of digging it. Water was struck.

It is also interesting and enlightening to study Baba's actions when his devotees tried to increase the number of amenities for him. He was setting an example of a perfect *fakir* thereby. Summer is very hot in Shirdi. So to give comfort to Baba in that season, devotees watered the frontyard of the mosque through pipes to make it cool. But Baba added fuel to fire and sat close to it. Similarly in winter, a thick cloth was put over the frontyard to protect him from cold and mist.
When the workers who erected it bowed to him at night before taking leave of him Baba said in a humourous tone, "All of you should protect me well", and added, "how can you protect me? I'll protect all of you!"

IV

Though not a regular point of Baba's daily life, there were quite a number of interesting occasions on which he left Shirdi on foot to neighbouring villages. At Nimgaon he used to visit one Mr.Dengle. Baba usually left Shirdi pretending that he was going to the stream. When people noticed him, they told Tatya that Baba was going away somewhere. Tatya used to run after him and say, "You won't come back if you go; we will not leave you; let us go to Nimgaon tomorrow". Baba would assure him that he would surely return to Shirdi and then proceeded on his way. At Nimgaon, Dengle used to receive him in all pomp and reverence, worship him, and offer him milk. Baba used to receive it in his can and drink it. After a little talk he used to return to Shirdi.

Similarly, when Baba visited the village of Rahata, people used to flock around him. His devotee of that village, Daulat Shah, used to receive Baba with music and procession. Baba stayed there for a while, smoked *chilim* with Daulat Shah and returned with the same pomp, followed by the procession of devotees upto the outskirts of that village. On such occasions Daulat Shah used to sprinkle small coins of money all along the way and sometimes he even accompanied Baba to Shirdi on foot. To whichever of these two villages he might go, Baba never stayed out of Shirdi even for a single night.

Sai Baba The Man and The Master

Sai Baba was about five and a half feet tall, neither stout nor lean. His complexion was golden yellow; his eyes were bluish and shone most mysteriously even in darkness. Indeed, they were the object of the devotee's wonder. The portrait now available to us in shops, with him seated on the stone, seems to show a slight squint in his left eye but indeed, there was no such thing. His nostrils were prominent. At the time when Sri Sai Sharananandaji had seen him, Baba had some of his teeth missing and the rest were not pure white in colour. He never brushed them but only rinsed his mouth with a little water every morning. He never drank either coffee or tea but he never told anyone to abstain from the same. He never told anyone how he contracted the habit of smoking *chilim*. He always used the same clay-pipe for the purpose. Devotees used to offer him many pipes but he never used them. He stacked them in the hollow of the *musjid* wall.

Baba always wore garments made of coarse whitish cloth. He never disclosed to anyone why he wore a small piece of cloth around his head. Except when he washed himself, Baba was never seen without this long shirt (*kufni*). At bathing time he wore a *langoti* (a wrestler's underwear). However, he never took a daily bath. He used to do so as and when he had the whim. Sometimes he did not bathe for even six weeks.

Very rarely, Baba tied a green lungi around his waist, and after washing his *kufni* in water, dried it above the sacred fire and wore it. The piece of cloth around his head too was very rarely changed and was never washed. When he decided to change his *kufni*, Baba sent for a tailor and told him "Get me a *kufni*". When it was brought, he always paid the tailor more than its worth. Usually he changed it every two or three months. When he did, he threw the old *kufni* in the sacred fire and did *namaskar* to it. Sometimes, when he changed his *kufni* he used to distribute a few more to some of his devotees.

Left to himself, Baba spoke very little. Mostly he was calm and quiet, speaking only when it was absolutely necessary. He never laughed loudly but smiled gently. Most of the time he used to sit with his eyes closed. When a devotee approached him for *darshan*, he used to glance at him. Sometimes he did not do even that. Yet he was always playful in the presence of children.

The most surprising thing is that Baba never sat leaning against the wall in the mosque. Even when he sat with his legs outstretched,he always sat a few inches away from the wall. Besides, he never lay down during the day. He hardly visited any temple at Shirdi.

Sri Marthand, the son of Mahalsapathy had watched Baba and his ways quite closely. He told me that at certain times Baba used to send for a barber named Balanai and used to have his head shaved. Balanai used to trim Baba's moustache so that its ends looked pointed. After the haircut Baba used to thrust his hand into the pocket of his *kufni* and pay the barber whatever came to his hand. But it was always much in excess of the normal payment due for a shave.

There are a few characteristic gestures and actions of Baba. Every morning he used to walk down to and from the mosque to the cross roads in front of the neem tree or what is now called the *Gurusthan*. Then he used to stand infront of the *musjid* and wave his hands towards the cardinal points repeatedly as though he beckoned to some invisible entities. Then he used to turn to his seat in the *musjid*.

One Hardwar Bua came to Shirdi. He always used to sit near the pillar at the corner of the sacred fire in the *musjid*. One day a girl sat in that place. Hardwar Bua soon came there and commanded her to get up and sat there. Baba flew into a rage and ordered all to clear out from the *musjid* and to sit in the frontyard. After some time Hardwar Bua again entered the *musjid* and sat in his usual place. But Baba again drove him out. Then the Bua realized that Baba was displeased with what he did to the girl. When everything belongs to God how can anyone claim anything as his own, including the sitting place?

We have noted in another chapter that on a holy *Diwali* day Baba had thrust his hand in the burning fire (*dhuni*) to save the child of a blacksmith who slipped accidentally and fell in the fire at a far off village. The burns on Baba's hand were terrible to look at. When devotees suggested that he should get his forearm treated by a doctor, Baba smiled and said, "Even if this body is kept on a pile of 2000 dung cakes and burnt up, we must be able to look on it unperturbed, and see what happens. That is the real evidence of *jnana* (Self-realization)".

One day when Baba was having lunch, a dog entered *Dwarakamai* and put its snout in the can containing buttermilk. Bade Baba who saw it at once ordered another devotee present to throw away the polluted buttermilk. Baba said, 'Why'? He then gave it to one Babu and got a dish prepared with it which he ate at night.

Sri Marthand, son of late Sri Mahalsapathi, has recounted to me the following characteristic incident :

One day a palanquin was carried to and set down in front of *Dwarakamai* by a band of attendants. It was curtained on all sides so that the inmates of it could not be seen. One of the attendants accompanying the palanquin carried a big vessel with its opening secured by a piece of a cloth into the mosque and kept it before Baba. Baba brusquely said, "Who has come (in the palanquin)?….. Whoever it is, remove the curtains!" The curtains were removed. The person in the palanquin was the princess Chimnabai, one of the then princely States of India. Baba told Mahalsapathy to see what the vessel contained. The latter looked up and said, 'It contains gold!' Baba, pointing at himself, said to Mahalaspathy 'Is this (i.e. Baba's form) the real gold or is that ?' "You are the treasure!" said Mahalsapathy. "Then send the vessel back to her!", ordered Baba. The vessel was promptly returned to the palanquin. Who is the prince of givers and who the receiver ?

During the holy nine-day festival (*Navaratri*) one Hariseetharam Dixit came to Shirdi from Nagpur. He saw everyone offering various fruits to Baba on the holy day and was sad that he had not the sense to do so. Just at that moment a devotee was distributing grapes that Baba had given him for the purpose to all the devotees present. Dixit too was given one. He atonce offered it to Baba and the latter ate it up. Dixit was immensely happy at Baba's gesture. For anyone else in Baba's place would have found fault with him for offering again what had already been offered once. But Baba responded to Dixit's yearning to offer something to him. Indeed, what is
involved in the gesture of offering something to god or *guru* ? One can only offer what god had given him!

*** * ***

One day a certain devotee was pressing Baba's feet. Sai Baba suddenly ordered him to stop doing so. The devotee felt dejected and appealed to Baba, with tears in his eyes, to accept his service. But it was of no avail. At first he could not understand why Baba had so suddenly reacted like that. But on cool introspection, he realized that some unworthy thought had passed his mind just at that moment. Baba was only responding to that!

* * *

Bhausaheb Pradhan was a devotee of saint Madhavanath, a contemporary of Sai Baba. Pradhan was sent to Baba by his *guru* to secure his blessings for the ear-holing ceremony of a boy. He also wanted to know whether only a goldsmith should do the job.

Pradhan arrived at *Dwarakamai* and sat among the rest of the devotees. No one had introduced him to Baba. Baba suddenly said, "Brother Madhavanath's (spiritual) son has come here today. We shall partake of Madhavanath's prasad…… I had a sack of gold on the back of an ass. But thieves had stolen it away… A hole in the ear has to be pierced only by a goldsmith….. It is very difficult to pull on in this naughty world…. You have been sent here only to know all this! Tell this much to my brother Madhavanath"

* * *

Devotee Purandhare had a very bad headache. He sent word to Baba through Dr. Pillay that it would be better for him to end his life than be subject to such a pain. Baba had sent him a snuff-like substance which immediately relieved Purandhare of his headache.

* * *

In 1918, on the eve of the holy day of *Sri Ramanavami*, *Namasaptaha* (incessant chanting of divine name for seven days) was going on. Several devotees were seated in *Dwarakamai*. Baba called Shama and told him, "Go out and fetch the candy which the old man standing outside has brought for me." Shama went out and did find a very old man standing there. He looked senile owing to age. Saliva was dripping from his parted lips and flies were swarming all over his face. Shama led the old man by the hand into Baba's presence. Baba then kept his hand on the old man's head in blessing, took a little candy from a small bundle in his garment and gave the rest to him as *prasad*.

* * *

There were occasional flashes of lighter moods in Baba. At such times, he used to play with his devotees. For instance, he used to hide the turban of a devotee like Tatya and enjoy the fun. Sometimes he put Tatya's turban on his own head, and used to mimic Tatya's manner and walk. Again, when Mahalasapathy was alone with him, Baba used to press Mahalsapathy's feet! When the latter protested, Baba used to say "Don't mind this. We are the same. People might say great things of me. But I am no such."

Sathe writes: "On several occasions I was invited to get *upadesh* (initiation) from others like Upasani Baba, Mrs. Athabai of Sangola, Phatak Maharaj of Moregaon. In each case, I referred the question to Sai. His response was negative. Though there was no formal initiation by Baba he wished me to look to him alone with undeviating attention and he was powerful enough and willing to look after my interests, temporal and spiritual."

An Anglo-Indian once visited Baba, not out of faith but idle curiosity. Baba emptied the pots in the mosque, of water and placed them inverted. The visitor thought the *fakir* was crazy and enquired, mockingly, what he did. Sharp came the reply, "Some pots (i.e., individuals) come to me like that. What can I do for them?"

B.A. Patel, an athlete used to demonstrate his physical power by forcefully massaging Sai's body, lifting him up and carrying him to his seat. One day he tried his utmost to do so but could not lift Sai up. The latter laughed mockingly. 'Baba taught me not to be proud of my physical strength. For it is nothing before spiritual strength,' Patel says.

Sai once repeatedly asked a *sadhu* for *dakshina* of Rs.5/-. The latter said, in a temper, "You know that I have no money. Why do you ask me still?" Sai smiled sportively and said, "You may have nothing to give, but why lose your composure?" What a practical method of teaching!

The Master

Though clothed in the human frame Sai Baba is essentially a mystic, a saint. That was how everyone treated and approached him; and the very name which they tagged on to him reveals that. If he lived and moved amidst the frail mortals, it is chiefly as a missionary of God and of the life divine. "I am the slave of God", he said. "*Allah Malik*" is his constant thought. "This is a brahmin, a white brahmin, a pure brahmin. This brahmin will lead lakhs of people to the *subhra marga* (the path of purity) and take them to the goal right up to the end. This is a brahmin *musjid*" – That sums up the essence of Sai Baba in his relation to the people amidst whom he lived. But what was he, as viewed by himself, and his relation to the rest of the creation? For that alone ultimately decides whether he was chiefly a man or a mystic. In different contexts he said, "I live at Shirdi and everywhere. *I am Parvardigar* (God)" "I am formless and everywhere!" "I am in everything and beyond." "I fill all space. All that you see taken together is Myself. I do not stir." "All the Universe is in Me."

It would be utter perversion to identify Sai Baba with the physical frame, to look upon him as a mere human being in the light of what we have noted in the earlier chapters. This, no doubt, was the significance of the cryptic words which Baba, in a vision, once uttered to Das Ganu Maharaj: "All the oil men and grocers of Shirdi teased me a lot; so I left the place." This is, of course, his characteristic way of referring to the lower propensities of the people as though he was referring to certain individuals.

The most succinct of Baba's recipes for spiritual perfection is, "People think they are all different from one another. But in this they are wrong. (For example) I am inside you and you are inside me. You should continue to think in this way. Then you will realize it." Baba embodies this outlook and the ultimate state of this realization. And he prescribes the same to us. That was how he could say, "Feeding the hungry bitch is feeding Me." Or "I am also in the mire-besmeared pig." He said, "This body is but my house. My *murshad* (*guru*) has long ago taken me away from this."

Still, nearly sixty years after Baba's *mahasamadhi*, people try to trace Baba's parentage, name, religion and caste as though they are inescapable, hard, objective realities! They try to investigate

the place of birth, *guru* and other details of one who is not his body and who never was in one place. If Baba appeared as a *sadhu* in one place and a *bhil* (a tribesman) in another then, is Sai to be regarded as a *bhil* or a *sadhu*? However, the name that people tagged to him seems to have been specially ordained for him by god and no other word can so aptly sum up his name, quality, creed, parentage and caste. He is 'Sai Baba'. Just that! He was in all and He is All. A more complete embodiment of Christ's injunction, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" cannot be found than he. For 'neighbour' to Baba meant the whole of existence with all its creatures; and he loved them *as* himself, as his own Self, and not as anyone would love himself. If this be the basis of Baba's infinite, love for all creatures, what fuller fulfillment of the Buddha's doctrine of compassion for all creatures and *ahimsa* can be found than in this 'Saint-father'?

Inspite of their recurring errors, how the devotees of Sai were constantly made aware of Sai Baba's perfection can best be seen in Mrs. Manager's account :

"One's first impression of Sai Baba was derived from his eyes. There was such power and penetration in his glance that none could continue to look at his eyes. One felt that Sai Baba was reading him, or her, through and through. Soon one lowered one's eyes and bowed down. One felt that he (Sai) was not only in one's heart, but in every atom of one's body. A few words, a gesture, would reveal to one that Sai Baba knew all about the past, present and even future and about everything else. There was nothing else to do for one except to submit trustfully and to surrender oneself to him. And there he was to look after every minute detail, and guide one safe through every turn and vicissitude of life. He was the *Antaryamin*, call him God or *Satpurusha* (One who is in the Absolute state of Being) in *sahaja sthiti* (the original state) or what you like. But the overpowering personality was there, and in his presence no fears, no questionings had any place and one resigned oneself and that was the only course, the safest and the best course…"

"One noticeable difference between Sri Sai Baba and other saints struck me. I have moved with other notable saints also. I have seen them in high *samadhi* or trance condition, entirely forgetting their body, and in its course effacing the narrow notion of the 'self confined to the body; and I have seen them later getting conscious of their surroundings, knowing what is in our hearts and replying to us. But with Sri Sai Baba, there was this peculiar feature: He had not to go into trance to achieve anything, or to reach any higher position or knowledge. He was every moment exercising a double consciousness, one actively utilizing the ego called 'Sri Sai Baba' and dealing with other egos in temporal or spiritual affairs, and the other-entirely superseding all egos and resting in the position of the Universal Soul or Ego; he was exercising and manifesting all the powers and features incidental to both the states of consciousness. Other saints would forget their body and surroundings and then return to it. But Sri Sai Baba was always in and outside the material world. Others seemed to take pains and by effort to trace the contents of other's minds and read their past history. But with Sri Sai Baba this was not a matter of effort. He was in the all-knowing state always….."

"It is not merely his power that endeared him to his devotees. His loving care combined with those powers made Shirdi a veritable paradise to the devotees who went there. Directly we went there, we felt safe, that nothing could harm us. When I went and sat in his presence, I always forget my pain, nay the body itself with all mundane concerns and anxieties."

"His accessibility to all and at all hours practically was a remarkable feature of his, 'My *darbar* (royal assembly) is always open', he used to say, 'at all hours'. He had nothing to fear from scrutiny, and nothing shameful to conceal. All his actions were open and above board."

"Another distinguishing feature of his life was freedom from care and anxiety. He had no interests to serve or protect, no institution to seek support for or maintain, no acquisitions to safeguard; no private property to feel anxious about."

Though most of Sai Baba's devotees had this insight, only some of them could be careful enough not to lose sight of it under the blunting effect of familiarity and prolonged contact. Not that it would lessen Baba's influence. Only they are likely to miss the joy of it and the real significance of their life's precious contact with him. To draw a parallel, Jesus told his apostles of his being the Christ and of the power of their faith in him. Yet when their boat was tossed by a stormy sea they panicked and Jesus Christ rebuked them as men 'of little faith'. His appearance in flesh and blood made them confuse the Christ with Jesus, the son of Mary. So too inspite of several insights into Lord Krishna's divinity, Arjuna, repeatedly erred into treating him just as a human comrade, a mere friend of yadava clan, for which he apologizes in "*The Bhagavadgita*". Such a view is presented by some accounts of Baba. Most surprisingly, this too comes from one of Baba's most intimate devotees, Madhavarao Deshpande whom Baba called 'Shama'. And Shama did repent, when Baba took *samadhi*, that he did not make the best use of that contact. Except on rare occasions like the cure of a snake bite, Baba rarely graced him with miraculous experiences. Once Shama even asked him, perhaps in a light-hearted way, "Baba, you have granted so much of wealth, property and position to so many of your devotees, but why haven't you given me anything? You are a *fakir* wearing rags, sleeping on a *gunny* (or sack cloth) in this old, dilapidated mosque. You are too miserly and you even beg your food from others. But everyone calls you 'God'. And it is we that made you one. If we deny that, who can question us?" Baba smiled very charmingly, cast a long, loving glance at his beloved child and said, "Money and wealth are not for you. Something else is in store for you."

On one occasion a Sindhi merchant offered to give golden sovereigns to this 'dearest of devotees to Sai' (i.e., Shama) but Sai Baba objected to it and did not allow him to give. Instead of giving money to Shama, as he gave to others, Baba gave him always sacred books like *'Eknath Bhagawatha'*, *'Vishnu Sahasranama.'* (The Thousand Divine Names of Lord Vishnu), and silver *padukas* (holy feet). Even among the dishes offered to him, Baba knew that Shama did not relish savouries. So he never gave them to Shama and when all other devotees left him, Baba gave him a mango or some sweet. Perhaps, this very humanity of Baba was an obstacle to Shama to have faith in him as a *Sadguru* par excellence.

As Shama kept closest to Baba, he had such closer glimpses of Baba's greatness as others were apt to miss. For instance, one day someone approached Baba for money. Shama knew that Baba hid it in his pocket. But Baba told the man a lie and said that he had no money with him. Later, when the man had left the mosque, Shama frankly asked him, "You are a *fakir* with no attachment for money and wedded to truthfulness. Why did you tell him a lie? Do you not always exhort us to be truthful?" Baba replied that as it was not good for him to be given the money, and he would not heed Baba's words if he were to tell the truth, and thus, for his own

good, the man had to be so treated.

As we have not yet transcended the identification of our selves with our bodies, we cannot help associating our idea of Baba's greatness with his physical form. For, after all, we know him first and foremost in that form; and, without it, we would never, know of him;and to love him with all our heart, to impress it indelibly on our minds, it is very essential for our progress. For Jesus the Christ too, like Baba, though he was 'the word' he was 'Word made flesh' in order to be known to us.

Dr. Gawanker records in his book how once a few visitors requested Baba to permit them to photograph him. At first Baba refused. However, on persuasion he agreed to get only his feet photographed. But they tried to take an unfair advantage of it by taking a full picture. To their astonishment only Baba's legs came off in the photograph! When yet another took a photograph without his consent, the picture that came off was that of the photographer's own *guru* and not that of Sai Baba! Besides, Baba attended the dinner in Hemadpant's house only in the form of his picture. When Bapusaheb Tarkhad forgot to offer *naivedya* to Baba's picture in his shrine in Bandra, Sai Baba referred to the matter at Shirdi to Mrs. Tarkhad and her son precisely at the same hour. That is the relationship between Sai Baba and his picture. Thus, we should look upon it as Baba himself who came to us in the form of the photograph. The remarkable rewards of such an attitude on our part are its ultimate justification.

A close study of Baba and his ways as were noted by his immediate devotees would help us to picturise Sai as a living force. We shall note, then, a few of this most distinct and striking aspects:-

What struck his devotees most and baffled them were his cryptic words and parables which few could understand besides the one to whom they were intended. Reference was already made to it in the earlier part of this book. Such were the strange, sudden and ungovernable flashes of Baba's anger for no reason whatsoever.

Mention must be made of the strange mystical rites which Baba was seen to perform sometimes. For instance, Mrs. Manager writes, "He would sit in the mornings near his *dhuni* (i.e., sacred fire) and wave his arms and fingers about, making gestures which conveyed no meaning to us and saying '*Haq*' (i.e., God)". Balakrishna Upasani Sastri records: "1910:- I went to the mosque and found Sai Baba at the *dhuni* in the mosque. He was standing close to the fire and occasionally turning round himself." B. N. Chandorkar noted that all *mantras* that Baba muttered were either in Arabic or Persian but not in Sanskrit.

Das Ganu Maharaj mentions another interesting fact of Baba's odd conduct: "Baba was occasionally doing something strange between 1 and 2 p.m. at the mosque with a cloth screen in front of him and when he was alone. He would take out of a pouch 10 or 15 old coins of different denominations and rub his fingertips constantly.

Abdullah who served Baba with devotion and faith describes the mystic rites which Baba undertook in the Lendi garden and we have noted them elsewhere.

We have already noted how, during the *chavadi* procession, Baba used to pause for a little while opposite the Maruthi temple and mutter something and make gestures to Maruthi, the deity in it. Again, on certain occasions, Baba was seen intensely gazing at the four cardinal directions by turns and muttering something and even waving his staff as though commanding some invisible entities. One devotee records that one day he found Baba, alone in the mosque, picking up a stone from the ground and threatening to throw it at some invisible entity without actually doing so.

G. G. Narke writes : "At an *arti* on my early visit, Sai Baba was in a towering passion. He fumed, cursed and threatened for no visible cause. I doubted if he was a madman. That was a passing thought. The *arti* was completed in the usual way. In the afternoon I went and massaged his legs. Then he stroked my head and said. 'I am not mad'. Lo! He was seeing my heart"!.

Some of these gestures and words were indeed used by Baba for commanding the forces of nature. One Jaiker writes, for instance, "Once when I was in the *musjid* with him, there was a severe storm, howling; the wind and rain were fierce. After a few minutes Baba stepped on to the edge of the premises and cried out (evidently to the storm) as did Christ in his time, *'Jara dhav'* i.e., 'Stop little.' Then the storm abated very quickly".

M. W. Pradhan, the then High Court lawyer too says. "At my first visit there was severe storm and rain for a quarter of an hour, when I was with Baba at the *musjid*. I then thought that if the rain continued a little longer like that streams would swell, and getting back to my place at Bombay would be difficult and Baba would not grant me early leave to go away. Baba then looked at the sky and said, "*Are Allah! Abhi barasat purakar ! Mere balbache ghar Janewale hain. Unko sukhse janede*" which means, 'Oh God! Enough, stop the rain, my children have to return home. Let them go back in comfort.' As he spoke, the rain became gentler and feebler. I felt that Baba knew my innermost thoughts. Then he gave me leave to go."

Sometimes his words were less intelligible. For instance, 'One day Sai Baba who was sitting in his usual place in the mosque suddenly bawled out, "Oh!" for no apparent reason. The next moment his head-dress and his *kufni* were suddenly found drenched with water and water was dripping from them for more than half an hour. The little space in the *Dwarakamai* became a pool of water. The devotees were amazed, and silently swept out the water and dried Baba's clothes. Neither Baba told them anything about it nor had they the boldness to ask him. On the third day Baba received a telegram from one of his devotees, Jahangirji Framji Daruwala, who offered his thanks to Baba for saving him.

The full story is this. Russo-Japanese war was in its bitterest phase. This devotee was the captain of a ship. "When he found that all his steamers save three were all sunk by the enemy and the rest of them, including his own, would soon meet the same fate, he took out Baba's photograph from his pocket and, with tears in his eyes, prayed to Baba to save him and his three steamers. Baba at once appeared on the scene and towed all the sinking steamers to the bank." (from "Sri Sai the Superman")

M.W.Pradhan also records another instance: "On a Thursday, during that period, Baba was preparing food in a *handi* i.e., a pot, to feed large numbers. He drove away every one from the *musjid* and was alone with his *handi*. At that time, to the great surprise and alarm of the spectators, myself and the two sons of Chandorkar went in. Baba, far from being angry, received us very well, as though for granting wholly private interview. At the *handi* I noticed with wonder that when the contents of the cauldron were boiling, Baba used his own bare palm and not a spoon or a laddle to stir the contents thoroughly to secure even and uniform consistency in the food or *sira*. His hand was not scalded or swollen by such use."

But Baba's play with fire was not always so harmless and the purpose could be something much more serious. Hemadpant in his "*Sai Satcharitra*" writes, "In the year 1910, Baba was sitting near the *dhuni* on the holy day of Diwali and warming himself. He was pushing firewood into the *dhuni*, which was brightly burning. A little later, instead of pushing logs of wood, Baba pushed his arm into the *dhuni*; the arm was scorched and burnt immediately. This was noticed by the servant Madhav and also by Madhavarao Deshpande. They at once ran to Baba and Madhavrao at once clasped his waist from behind and dragged him forcibly backward and asked, '*Deva* why have you done this?' Then Baba came to his senses and replied, 'The wife of a blacksmith at some distant place was working the bellows of a furnace; her husband called her. Forgetting that her child was borne on her waist, she turned round hastily and the child slipped into the furnace. I immediately thrust my hand into the furnace and saved the child. I do not mind my arm being burnt, but I am glad that the life of the child is saved."

As Sai Baba himself said, saints exist to give blessings to people both in temporal and spiritual fields, the former being utilized to draw them to the latter. All perfect saints are fishers of men's souls who use their power to free people from suffering, to bait them into the life eternal. Thus Christ is the one who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. What Christians call Baptism is what Hindus call *diksha* or *Brahmopadesha*. Therein man is initiated into or bathed in the mysteries of life whereby he is born again in to the Spirit. Once again even the specific expressions used in this context in the two traditions are literally the same i.e., dying to the earlier life of mere sensuousness through repentance; it consists in action and not mere words. The transformation which almost amounts to the death of the old personality and the emergence, in its place, of another which is sublime is one of the central mysteries of the "inner life" ("The Kingdom of heaven is within"). It is next only to the final consummation of becoming "perfect even as the Father in Heaven is Perfect", for which the *Sadguru* (Perfect Master or God come as *guru*) or the Christ provides the model, both for the Way and the Goal, and Life too. The Perfection of the Godman, call him the Christ (or 'the word become flesh') or the Buddha (or 'the illumined') or *Sadguru* ('the perfect Master') consists in his effecting this spiritual re-birth among the people whom he 'fishes'. This is the most mystic of all the mystic's rites. It is thrilling to see Baba in action in this field.

The Master and His ways of Teaching

Different devotees were drawn by Baba to himself and each derived benefit by experience according to his ripeness. Baba's methods of teaching were as varied as were his devotees.

A characteristic form of his teaching was in the form of parables and stories. Some of them were often the accounts of some one or the other of his devotees assembled there though Baba used to narrate it in the first person. Others were more cryptic and less direct in their import. They were intended to be understood only by one or two among the devotees. Others often took them for meaningless gossip and it made him seem a mad *fakir* to most of the natives of Shirdi. Such were the words that Baba spoke to Haji Siddik Falke. (See Ch.4 "Call of the Guru" and excerpts from Khaparde's "Shirdi Diary".)

Some of these parables were less cryptic and, with a little thought, can be understood by all. We shall note two from Das Ganu's account. (1) Sai Baba once said to his devotees, "I was at Puntamba. There was a struggle between two parties. I wondered why they fought. I found near them a pot full of coins. That was the bone of contention between them. Then I quietly moved up and carried it away. They found that their wealth was gone and began to mourn and lament. I was saying to myself, "Who am I? What is this wealth? Whose is it? What confusion and struggle for this? The pot is mine and I am the pot's". (The parable is like a double-edged knife, giving off two complementary significances. At one level, it points out the arbitrary and illusory nature of anyone's claims for possessions. At another level the treasure trove symbolizes the infinite wisdom hidden at the root of our consciousness which, helps one to transcend the illusion of 'I' and 'mine'. Not having got to that stage the people wrangled over a pot of material wealth. Baba had won the wisdom and hence his was the real treasure.

(2) "Once, at Shirdi, somebody had prepared *'sira'* (i.e. sweetened semolina pudding). Baba asked me if I was given *sira*. I then said that I was not on good terms with Baba and that I was not given *sira*. Baba then gave me instruction: 'Who gives what and to whom? What is this *sira*? Who eats it? Do not say of anyone that he is inimical to you. Who is whose enemy? Do not entertain any ill feelings towards anyone. All are one and the same'.

Sometimes Baba did not speak in parables but acted them. Note, for instance, how practically he demonstrated the inviolability of God's decree and how a devotee had to derive courage from a firm faith in it. This incident was recorded by Prof. Narke.

"Baba used to get sweetmeat from a *halvayi* (a vendor of *halva,* a sweet) for *naivedya* (offering to *guru* or God). One day, in 1916, the *halvayi* lay dead, a plague-stricken corpse. Plague was raging at Shirdi. Baba asked me to go and get the sweetmeat from his shop. I went and told the late *halwayi's* wife (who was weeping) of Baba's order. She pointed to the corpse and said that I

might take the sweetmeat from the *almyrah* if I dared to. I took it, trembling with fear that by this I and others might catch the infection. Baba received it and distributed the same as *prasad* to all. Baba told me. 'You think you will live if you are away from Shirdi and that you would die if you stay here. That is not so. Whosoever is (destined) to be struck (by death) will be struck: whosever is to die will die. Whosoever is to be caressed……"

"He encouraged me similarly when cholera raged at Shirdi. He had lepers about him who massaged his legs. One of them got cured. Baba made a leper take the *udi* from the *dhuni* and gave it as *prasad* to the devotees. Yet no harm had resulted so far as I know."

Today we know that leprosy is not contagious; yet many highly educated intellectuals shudder when they see a leper at close quarters. And if this is the state of the people today, what it was nearly sixty years ago can be easily guessed and the strength of mind that Baba was inculcating in his devotees can be guaged. Mrs. Manager recounts how Baba once made her eat a *peda* which he took from a leper's bag. We are very likely to fail to appreciate such a gesture on the part of Baba. His devotees looked upon him as their Guru-God and it involved a test of their faith while strengthening it. If we know that leprosy is not contagious, what have we to say of cholera and plague cases which Narke has mentioned? His devotees were safe in spite of Baba making them eat what was brought from a house which was plague-stricken. The devotees concerned must have thought that either Baba or God must have saved them. And either way it is good spiritually. Numerous other unmistakable cases of his miraculous healing were there. If anyone viewed them only as instances of Baba's fore-knowledge that an 'X' or 'Y' is likely to be affected, even that is faith in Baba's unerring knowledge of the future, in his omniscience of the other man's natural resistance to catch a disease, or in a destiny which must have been so determined for Baba to know it before hand. And the strength of this argument will be doubly- clear if we ponder for a moment as to how many of today's medical experts, with all their sophisticated equipment, can say unerringly that such-and-such-a-one is immune from such a disease, and that on such a large scale as Baba did?

"But", the reader might ask, "how did the devotee receive these horrible gestures of Baba?" The characteristic example can be seen in Mrs. Manager's statement regarding Baba who recalled a leper, took a *peda* from him and made her eat it. "Why he was recalled and I alone was the chosen recipient of his *peda,* none then understood. But I knew full well that Sai Baba had read my heart and was teaching me valuable lessons (e.g.) in humility, fraternity, sympathy, endurance and trust in His supreme wisdom rather than in my own notions of hygiene and sanitation for saving me from disease."

Pride can be of many types and all are equally potent obstacles to one's spiritual progress. But the most difficult one to control or conceal, and yet the most elusive of its forms is pride in one's own faith in and love for god or *guru*. And Baba was quick in noticing it in his devotee and ruthless in nipping it in the bud. One day when Balwant Nachne and others were there Baba complained of stomache ache. An old lady fetched a red-hot brick and put it on Baba's stomach. Balwant could not bear to see it. Then the lady started massaging Baba's abdomen with much force. Nachne could contain himself no longer but asked the lady to be more gentle in her service. Baba was at once wild with his interference in another's devotion and service and asked him to get away immediately. And he did so.

Sometimes Baba was the sole actor in an incident from which the devotees could learn much. Indeed his whole way of living was a continuous teaching of perfect humility, purity, self-control, equality and generosity. He was like the Buddha, Jesus. The christ and Mohammed in that his life was a model of his teaching. But certain of the incidents were more strikingly so.

One day, at noon, Baba asked some one to get a ladder and with the help of that, climbed the roof of one Vaman Gondkar's house and from there walked over the roof of Radhakrishnamai's house and got down from the other side. Why he did so remained a mystery. Some thought that it was his mysterious manner of curing Radhakrishnamai of malaria from which she was suffering. After climbing down from the other side, Baba gave Rs.2/- to the man who had brought the ladder. When someone made bold to ask him why he paid such on exorbitant price for such a minor service, he simply replied that nobody should take the labour of others free; that the worker should be duly and liberally paid.

Baba's omniscient gaze was ever watchful of his devotee's conduct and if he ever discovered that any of them was committing a folly, he was prompt in his correction. We have mentioned some instances in the chapter on Baba's omniscience.

Once, one of the devotees was wasting his precious after-noon in reviling one of his acquaintances behind his back in the *wada*. A little later, the said devotee met Baba at Lendi garden. Baba then pointed to a pig and said, "See with what relish it is gorging on night soil! Your conduct was similar. You go on reviling your own brethren to your heart's content. You have obtained a human birth as a result of much merit in your past life. But if you behave like this, what can a trip to Shirdi do to you?"

The perfect skill with which Baba could bring home a moral to one or more devotees through a single, complex, situation involving all of them is wonderful. He engineered, as it were, a situation so that the teaching did not remain a merely abstract one. It was such as to expose the undesirable aspect of the devotee's personality in action so that the devotee could no longer close his eyes to it.

Once a Ramadasi visited Baba and stayed in his presence for some days. Everyday, after his bath the visitor used to read the 'Vishnu sahasra nama'. One day Baba requested him to fetch *sona mukhi*, a mild laxative herb, from the *bazaar* as he was having pain in his stomach. When the Ramadasi left, Baba picked up his book 'Vishnusahasranama' and gave it to Shama and said, "Shama, this book is very efficacious. Once, my heart began to palpitate and death seemed imminent. Then I hugged the book and it gave me immediate relief! I thought *Allah* himself came and saved me. I want to present you with this great book. Read it slowly little by little, at least one name a day and it will do you good."

Shama thought that Baba was playing a joke on him by trying to set the Ramadasi against him and said, "Baba, the Ramadasi is a very ill-tempered man and he will quarrel with me thinking that I have stolen his book. Besides, I cannot read Sanskrit". But Baba was not merely joking; he was really bestowing his grace to the beloved devotee by giving him an efficacious book consecrated by his touch. He forced Shama to accept it.

The Ramadasi returned a little later with *sona mukhi*. Another devotee, Anna Chinchinikar, wanted to help Baba in playing the practical joke. So he at once told the Ramadasi of what had happened. The Ramadasi flared up and started charging Shama with theft of the book and in his rage he said that he employed Baba as a ruse to send him to the *bazaar* so as to knock off that book! He said that if Shama did not return the book he would dash his own head before him and die.

This side of the Ramadasi's personality was what Baba wanted to expose and correct and the situation developed exactly as he wanted. So he addressed the Ramadasi and said, "Oh Ramadasi, why are you so furious? Is not Shama our own man? How is it that you, a devotee, are so quarrelsome and so biting in your speech? Your mind is still impure inspite of reading such holy books, and your passions still uncontrolled! As a Ramadasi (a servant or devotee of Sree Rama) you ought to be indifferent to all things. It is strange that you covet the book so much that you are so wild with Shama for taking it. Go, sit and ponder coolly over the whole thing: books can be had for money and not men. I took the book and gave it to him and he is not to blame. After all, what is the price of the book ? Besides, you have already memorised it thoroughly."
The lesson went home to the Ramadasi.

This incident has gained its several objectives: to benefit Shama with the reading of such a book, consecrated and given by Baba who is unrivalled in his awareness of the spiritual needs of his devotees; to inculcate and strengthen the faith in him that he should accept anything that Baba, his *guru*-god, gave without presuming to judge it by the tiny light of his own moral judgement;
to teach the Ramadasi the need to control his passions and be happy in giving others at least what he no longer needed and what is likely to benefit them. Finally, the whole episode, when taken at one glance, is just calculated to confirm, to one and all, how Baba's mind is unerring in directing a situation to pin-point the flaws in the personalities of his devotees and giving them the necessary correctives which would contribute to their spiritual betterment.

Baba's teaching did not always come through the medium of language or in elaborate action. The communication was sometimes mysterious. And what was so conveyed was usually something which words cannot convey. Sri Narayana Ashram records his experience: "Sai Baba had different ways of dealing with different people. He was the centre and to each man he darted a separate radius…..immediate proximity was not needed for spiritual development under Baba. When I was at Shirdi, I would mostly go and sit away by myself in the *wada* and not be at the mosque. Even at the wada, one is under Baba's direct influence…Baba had a way of touching (with his palm) the head of the devotee who went to him. There was no *adhikari* (i.e. deserving person) evidently, to receive everything Baba could give and thus there were none to succeed
him to his position. But his touch did convey certain impulses, forces, ideas, etc. Sometimes he pressed his hand heavily on the head as though he was crushing out some of the lower impulses of the devotee. Sometimes he tapped, sometimes he made a pass with palm over the head, etc. Each had its own effect - making remarkable difference in the sensations or feelings of the devotee. Baba's touch was one means. Apart from that, he would invisibly operate on the nature of the devotee and effect a great change in him. He graciously conveyed to me without any words, the feeling that all the differences were unreal, that the one real thing is that which
underlies all. This was after my first visit in 1913 or 1914 perhaps. But Baba never spoke out this

truth so far as I know."

A similar experience was had by one Rajballi Mohammad of Bandra.- "I had nothing particular to ask of him (Baba). I wanted only an increase of faith. I wanted that at my death I may die, possessed of full *iman* or faith so that I may have a good end. I prayed to him for that and asked for his blessings. He placed his hand on my head and blessed me. From that moment his blessings have borne fruit. My faith has steadily increased."

In Khaparde's diary we come across many references to Baba's *yogic* glance which is said to have unlocked the flood-gates of immense spiritual bliss that filled the whole of the devotee's being for a considerable duration.

Janardan Galwankar of Bandra writes "On one such occasion, it was perhaps in 1917, when I went to Shirdi, he placed his palm over my head and that had a strange effect on me. I forgot myself and all surroundings and passed into an ecstatic condition….. Since I got ecstasy by Baba's blessing, I began to pay more attention to *adhyatma* i.e., spiritual side of my existence."

Sai Baba sometimes employed more subtle and mystical modes of teaching his devotees even when the teaching in itself had to be direct and explicit. One Narayan Ambedkar of Poona had to face a series of calamities for seven years after his retirement and there seemed to be no end to his suffering inspite of his repeated visits to Shirdi. In 1916 he grew desperate and wanted to commit suicide in the holy presence of Baba, so that he might at least fare better in his next life. One night, while sitting in a bullock cart in front of Dixit's *wada*, he decided to put an end to his miseries by jumping into a nearby well. But Baba had his mysterious way of dealing with his devotee. Just as Ambedkar was entertaining these dark thoughts, Sagun Meru Naik, the owner of a nearby tea-stall was impelled mysteriously to approach Ambedkar. Saying, "Did you ever read this life-history of Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot?", he gave the book to him. When Ambedkar opened the book at random it opened on a particular page which contained, as it were, this pertinent message for him:

A certain devotee of the Swami of Akkalkot was overtaken by so many calamities that he resolved to commit suicide and one night threw himself in a well. Then the saint promptly arrived on the scene and, after rescuing his devotee, told him, "You must enjoy the result, good or bad, of your past actions; if you evade it in the middle you will have to take another birth and suffer the rest of it again; so why not exhaust the whole lot of evil *karma* at one stretch and be rid of it forever?" the devotee assented and thanked the Swami for his prompt and timely instruction.

The incident was a timely eye-opener to Ambedkar. Later Sai Baba told him that, as his father was a devotee of the Swami of Akkalkot, he should walk in his father's foot-steps and be devoted to the same Swami. Later, Ambedkar studied astrology and gained proficiency enough to secure his livelihood through it.

This episode has a close parallel in those incidents in which Baba asked his devotee to go and listen to the reading of a *purana* and through that the devotee's doubts were clarified. So too Das

Ganu's difficulties in his reading of the *Isopanishad* were, as though by Baba's order, clarified by a song that was accidentally sung by Kakasaheb's maidservant!

There is another instance of Baba teaching in an indirect manner. One Sathe, who was dejected owing to heavy loss in trade, visited Baba and made a devout *saptaha parayana* (devotional reading of a holy book in a week) of "*Sri Gurucharitra*" and , at the end of it, Baba graced him with a significant dream: He saw Baba, with the book in his hand, was explaining something to him. When he recounted it to Baba, Hemadpanth happened to hear it and he grew restless; for, while a single reading of the work in a week bore such a fine fruit to Sathe, his own reading of the same holy book for forty years produced no such.

At once Baba asked him to go Shama, take Rs.15/- as *dakshina* from him, sit and chat with him for a while at his house and then return to *Dwarakamai*. When Hemadpanth called at Shama's, the latter was just about to sit for his daily worship. He asked Hemadpanth to be seated for a while till he finished his daily *puja* and went into his house. When Hemadpanth sat in the front verandah, he saw the celebrated work *Nath Bhagwat* (Saint Eknath's commentary on *The Bhagavatam*) in the book-shelf. He was in the habit of reading a portion of it every day. This reminded him of the fact that on that particular day he had skipped the daily reading and decided to finish it. He realized that Baba had sent him to Shama's house to remind him of his sacred duty. As though in confirmation of this idea, when Hemadpanth opened the book at random, it just opened on the portion which was due to be read on that day! And when he had just finished his reading, Shama too finished his *puja* and promptly came out. Then Shama felt impelled to recount some of Baba's deeds. He told Hemadpanth of a lady who decided not to touch any food or drink until and unless Baba had accepted her as his *chela* (or disciple) and initiated her with a *mantra*. He told Hemadpanth how Baba explained to the lady that giving initiation to anyone was not his way; that he (Baba) himself became perfect only through unswerving love and devotion to his *guru* and not as a result of any initiation.

This narration, along with the miracle of his finishing his daily reading of *Nath Bhagwat* had set Hemadpanth's restless mind at ease. Now, in retrospect, he had a thrilling revelation of his own better fortune than even Sathe's. Sathe saw and heard Baba's instruction only in his dream, the impact of which was less direct. But in his own case Baba's grace was much more tangible. For Baba, whose remote but sure control of events was already proved by the episode of the *Nath Bhagawat*, had secretly impelled Sathe to recount his dream-experience in his (i.e. Hemadpanth's) presence and thereby made his mind restless and eager for an instruction. Then he was explicitly sent by Baba to Shama's house to finish his daily reading of the holy book and to listen to the invaluable and very apt account of Baba's *leela* given by Shama. Thus he received Baba's instruction more tangibly than did Sathe.

Some of Baba's teachings were direct and explicit. We shall note a few here. Abdul Baba says, "Baba's practical advice to me was that I should not sleep over my Koran reading. He said, 'Eat very little. Do not go in for a variety of eatables. A single sort of dish will suffice. Do not sleep much!" obviously, it is not an easy piece of advice to follow and occasionally Abdul had his slips. But Baba's methods of correction were very considerate and were positively encouraging. Abdul writes: "One night I was tired and tried to sleep, holding my palms in front of me to rest my drowsy head. Then Baba said, 'Are you trying to see the moon?' That night I fell asleep and

fell upon Baba and his *gaddi* (elevated seat) in that sleeping condition. Baba gently stroked my feet, and I awoke. Next day, strange to say, when I took water in my palms and looked, there was a big moon in that water. It was 2 p.m. This was what Baba had spoken of. Baba's blessings to me were strange and sometimes concealed in abuse and violence. He had beaten me and Mr. Jog many times".

Balabhat of Andheri visited Baba on the festival of *Deepavali* in 1909. One day after 8 p.m., Balabhat asked Baba to give him *upadesh* or initiation and be his *guru*. Then Baba replied, "It is not essential that one should have a *guru*. Everything is within us. What you sow, you reap. What you give, you get. There is no need for a *guru*. It is all within you. Try to listen within and follow the direction you get. We must look at our 'Self' *That* is the monitor, the *guru*."

The type of instruction that he had given Abdul or Balabhat cannot be generalised as Baba's essential teaching. For there is and can be no such a teaching – an absolute teaching for all. No two persons are alike and so no one method can suit all. In gauging the devotee's ripeness and giving him the kind of teaching that he individually needs and in giving him the necessary fillip lies the greatness of a *guru*. Or else the mountains of books that we have, would have sufficed to make great saints of all human beings. Books on medicine are no substitutes to an astute physician. And we shall look at such instances in Baba's teaching.

Nanasaheb Nimonkar wished to read *The Bhagawata* as his daily devotional study but he did not know Sanskrit. Baba one day said to him, "Kaka. Why don't you read *pothi*?" "I do not know Sanskrit", said Nimonkar, "Never mind", Baba assured, "*Musjidi Mai* (mother *musjid*) will teach you Sanskrit, and gradually you will learn".

With faith in Baba's words he began reading *The Bhagawata* daily, not minding whether he understood it or not. Gradually he began to understand and soon attained such proficiency in Sanskrit and mystical philosophy that he could clear the doubts which even those who were well versed in Sanskrit, like Kakasaheb Dixit and Jog, got in their study of philosophical treatises like *The Jnaneswari* and *The Bhagavadgita*. However, at one stage Baba told him, "Why should we explain things to others? That will make us puffed up with self-conceit".

Here, Baba is not advocating any kind of narrow minded unconcern for a fellow devotee's spiritual development. Far from it, He did advise certain others to read and expound philosophical texts. This piece of advice is specific to Nimonkar and how useful it is can be seen if we but remember how many are the *pundits* who get bogged down by scholastic discussion and argument and the spiritual pride generated therein would close their eyes to their own real spiritual inadequacy. The pharisees and scribes in the case of Jesus Christ's life provide a parallel.

Devotees of a Godman like Baba are easily tempted to commit one error i.e. to think that he would do, by his omnipotence, all that the devotee wishes him to do. It is necessary to remember, especially for a devotee, that Baba's superior wisdom knows how to judge a situation better. But any amount of verbalizing over this would not do. A practical lesson is necessary.

In 1915, a rich old man of Harda who was suffering from tuberculosis came to Shirdi with a lady. During the first month there was gradual improvement in his condition, but thereafter it showed a sharp decline. His end seemed near and Prof. Narke was sent to Baba for *udi*. Baba told the professor that the man would be better for quitting the earth and said, "What can the *udi* do? Any how take the *udi* and give it as it is wanted". Shama was then sent to intercede with Baba, but Baba said the same thing as he did to Prof. Narke, but in a cryptic manner which outwardly seemed to mean the opposite! "How can he die? In the morning he will come to life".

This was taken to mean that the old man would survive and nobody noticed the warning implied in the wording of the second sentence. The man died and the devotees felt that Baba gave false hope. A little later, one of the relations of the old man saw Baba in a dream with the deceased man's head over his own. Baba disclosed the lungs of the late old man. They were in a rotten state and Baba said, "From the torture of all this I have saved him". Thereafter the relations of the old man renewed their visits to Shirdi. For they know that many were the cures which Baba effected if he considered them worthwhile and beneficial to the affected soul. That and not the attachment of kinsfolk to the sick person was Baba's criterion in deciding whether to heal or not. We will see elsewhere how Baba knew the past of a person even to hundreds of his previous lives and so he knew minutely the causes that underlay his joys and sorrows; he knew the potentialities of each and he used his superknowledge in getting the best for his devotee without violating god's justice too much. Many were the cases in which Baba deemed it wiser to let a creature die, as in the case of a tiger.

As Bhagavan Ramana had often pointed out, though self-realization is the result of grace, grace never comes without efforts, i.e. arbitrarily. And Sai Baba was asking everyone to exert, exert himself in his spiritual exercises and in being vigilant against the negative tendencies of his own mind. The variety of his teachings and his ways could be summed up in the words of his first biographer, Hemadpanth:-

"He who wants to get rid of the cycle of births and deaths should lead a righteous life with his mind calm and composed. He should not speak cuttingly to anyone so as to hurt him to the quick. He should always engage himself in good actions, should do his duties and surrender himself heart and soul to Him. He need not then be afraid of anything. He who trusts Him entirely, hears and expounds His *leelas* and does not think of anything else is sure to attain self-realization.
Baba asked many to remember His name, but to those who wanted to know who they were, he advised *sravan* (hearing) and *manan* (contemplation on teaching of the *guru*). To some he advised remembering God's name; to others, hearing His *leelas*; to some the worship of his feet; to others the reading and study of the *Adhyatma Ramayan*, Jnaneswari and other sacred scriptures. Some he made to sit near His feet, some he sent to Khandoba's temple, and to some he enjoined the repetition of the thousand names of Lord Vishnu and to some, the study of the *Chandogyopanishad* and *Gita*. There was no limit or restriction to his instructions. To some, He gave them in person. To others by visions and dreams. To one addicted to drink, He appeared in his dream, sat on his chest, pressed it (hard) and left him (only) after he gave a promise not to touch liquor. To some, He explained *mantras* like *Gurur Brahma* in dreams. To one devotee who was practicing *hata* yoga, he sent word that he should leave off *hata yoga* practices, sit quiet and wait (i.e. for God's grace). It is impossible to describe all His ways and methods. In ordinary dealings, He set examples by his actions..." (*Sri Sai Satcharitra*).

The God-man and Tradition

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." (*Mathew* 5:17).

So said Jesus Christ. But he was looked upon by the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes as the violator of the Law. For some of his actions seemed, to their narrow vision, to contradict the injunctions of the Law. His apparent flouting of law is only to enable to people to realize the spirit of it and not convert it into a dead ritual with no relevance to their spiritual purification. In fact, every God-man or perfect one appears amidst mankind as the son of Man only to correct the race in its understanding of the spirit of the Law. So to those of little understanding he looks a heretic and is 'persecuted for righteousness sake'; he resisted not evil (5:39). Indeed he prayed for those who persecuted and crucified him: "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." So was Mohammed persecuted and so was the Buddha. And so did each of them lovingly teach the mankind that hated them, the message of love and devotion.

Sai Baba of Shirdi was also looked down by the orthodox among the Hindus and Moslems alike. The Hindus accused him of being in a Mosque, of being a moslem, of not observing Hindu rituals, of tolerating Moslem ways of worship. But some had the 'eyes to see' and 'ears to hear' the truth of Sai Baba's mission and Baba taught them the same lesson which a Christ or Buddha did, that the spirit of the law was to purify man's spirit and the letter of it without the spirit, when observed as a convention, was wasteful. But an acceptance of such a teaching presupposed immense faith on the part of his devotees that Baba knew better. Sometimes Baba deliberately put their faith to test.

One day, a poor brahmin approached Baba for money. Baba handed him a packet of mutton and said to him, "Go and eat it at home with your children; but don't open it on the way". The brahmin did not know what the packet contained. After taking leave of Baba he could not check his curiosity. So he sat near a stream and opened it and was shocked to find mutton in it. In disgust he threw it in the stream. But he was surprised to see that when it touched the water, it turned into gold and sank into its depth. The piece of mutton is symbolic of Baba's teaching: it is precious, though to the orthodox, it looks unworthy.

Similarly on one *Ekadasi* day (eleventh day after the full or new moon, auspicious to the Hindus) a devotee by name Jog asked Baba as to what dish should be prepared as holy offering to him. Baba said, "Prepare onion *kichadi*." Onion is a prohibited item of food, especially for a Brahmin. Yet Jog, obeyed Baba's order and offered him the same. Baba laughed, tasted a little of it and gave it back saying. "It is good, distribute it to all and you too eat it." Though Jog always fasted on *Ekadasi*, he obeyed Baba's command.

However, such eye-opening pranks were not directed by Baba at the Hindu devotees only. Once a moslem vowed to Baba that if, by his grace, they had a child, they would visit Shirdi and

distribute sweets to all in his name. Shortly after, they had a child and so the family visited Shirdi to fulfill their vow. Baba asked them to distribute *peda* (milk cake) in the Maruthi temple opposite the mosque. The moslem devotee was taken aback and said, "As moslems how can we go to a Hindu temple to fulfill our vow.?" Baba good humouredly said, "There was a fight between Allah and Maruthi; Maruthi defeated Allah (so the former deserves to be honoured)". The moslem couple was very averse to his command. So he flared up, rushed to beat the moslem saying, "What a moslem (i.e., the faithful) you are! Go and distribute it there"! The moslem realized what Baba meant, and distributed the sweet in the temple.

The significance of Baba's words would become evident if we understand the utterly unreasonable attitude of the devotee. On the one hand he resorted to Baba for a child, as his last refuge and he did get one. Can such a powerful saint err in asking him not to be too obsessed with religious differences? The interruption of their earlier faith by the latter doubt is ruinous to any faithful ones.

This idea of Baba is more clearly expressed in another curious incident. One day a party of moslems arrived at the mosque for a *namaz* and at the same time a group of Hindus also arrived for *bhajan* (devotional chanting). Each party complained against the other. Baba patiently heard them both and remarked, "Neither your *bhajan*, nor their *namaz* is worth the name, get out!"

Tatya, one of the intimate devotees of Baba, was very orthodox and regularly observed fast on *ekadasi* days. But once he came into contact with Baba, the latter invariably gave him something to eat on the days of fasting so that he was obliged to stop fasting. We have to realize that Baba was not propagating heresy. Even the books of Law, like Manu Dharmasastra says that if *sastras* contradict the words of a perfect sage, the latter have to be preferred.

Baba's attitude to tradition can best be seen in his answers to the questions put on to him by Madhavarao alias Shama. Once Madhav Rao asked Baba whether it was true that there were fifty crores of *yadawas* in Dwaraka as mentioned in the *puranas*. "Baba, Prof. Narke says that the account given by the *puranas* is false." But Baba replied: "No, It is all true. Even Rama and Krishna did really exist."

On another occasion Shama asked Baba, "Baba, is it true that one crore of *vanara* army assembled at the time of Rama's war against the demon king Ravana? How could so many assemble in one place?"

Baba replied that it was true that so many of them had assembled and that he personally saw them gathering one above the other, as ants do.

Shama said "How could you witness what happened so long ago? If you were there then how were you?"

Baba : Innumerable births went by for you and for me. You don't know them but I do. I was as I am now.

On yet another occasion Shama asked: "Are Vishnu-and Brahma-*lokas* real? If they are, you must show me those. For, they say that when compared with those worlds, this one of ours is trivial."

Baba : "Don't worry about them; for when compared with God they are still more trivial. For those worlds are also of the same nature as our world (i.e., transcient).

Shama : But you must enable me to realize the truth of what you say!

Then Baba asked him to close his eyes. Immediately on closing his eyes Shama could see those subtle other worlds. As he went on seeing them Baba proceeded to point out *Brahma* in the *Brahmaloka* and told him that it was *Satya loka*. Next, Baba showed him *Vishnu loka* and pointed out *Vishnu* seated therein, and *Kailasa* with Siva in it. Finally, Baba ended the vision and told Shama, "These realms of existence are not to be desired by us. What we want is different and still higher".

S.B. Nachne records two interesting incidents which reveals Baba's shrewdness in combating orthodox intolerance:-

"In May 1915, I went to Shirdi accompanied by my mother-in-law and others. We were put up at Sathe's *wada* and Dada Kelkar was living in a part of the same premises. When my mother-in- law was cutting onions for our meal, Dada Kelkar, on orthodox brahmin who abhored onions, got enraged and berated her severely. She took his abuse very much to heart. A few hours later, Dada's grand daughter was crying on account of severe pain in her eyes and he went to Baba for relief. Baba then told him to foment her eyes with onion. Dada asked, "Where am I to get onion?" Baba always kept some onions with him and perhaps Dada hoped to get one from him. But he told Dada to get it from my mother-in-law. She told Baba that Dada had been abusing her that very morning for using onions in her meal, and that she would not care to give him anything – but if it was Baba's order she would do so. Baba ordered the gift and she had her grand revenge of doing good to one who had so recently lacerated her feelings."

"When people were assembling for *arti* at the *musjid*, I was among them. Baba asked me to go and take my meal. I said it was *ekadasi* (the day of fasting). Usually I did not fast on *ekadasi* days; but my two friends did and I had to conform to their ways. But Baba did not want me to fast. He said (referring to my companions), 'These people are mad. You had better go to the *wada* and eat'. The man at the *wada* grumbled that I should be clamouring for food on an *ekadasi* day and would not give me food till *arti* was over. So I came to the mosque along with him to attend the *arti*. Baba again asked me if I had messed but I said it was time for *arti* and so the meal might be deferred till the completion of the same. Baba said, 'The *arti* will begin after you finish your meal'. The cook had to yield and he gave me food. Then I went to the mosque for the *arti*. At that time a lady generally known as *Mavusi* brought *beda* (i.e., betel and nut) to Baba. Baba gave me some and asked me to eat. As it is customary to avoid chewing betel and nut on *ekadasi* days I hesitated. Baba said again, 'eat it'. I obeyed and chewed the *beda*"

Not only did Baba reject the dead traditions and accept the traditions which are good but he also interpreted them afresh even as Christ had done to the ancient Jewish Law in his Sermon on the

Mount. These God-men came 'not to destroy' but 'to fulfil' the scriptures, fulfilling in both the senses of the word namely in reestablishing their infallibility and also supplementing and 'completing' them wherever they are inadequate or incomplete. For instance, one of Baba's Hindu devotees complained that though he tried his best to fulfill the ancient injunction that one should feed an *athithi* (guest who arrives by chance); some times even after waiting or searching for one, he had not often been able to find anyone. Baba said, "Nana, the *sastras* (sacred laws) are not at fault, nor are the *mantras* wrong; you have got into your head some worthless interpretation and then stand and wait for guests. (So) they will not turn up. Does the term *athithi* denote only a man, 3 ½ cubits high, and of the brahmin caste only ? *Athithi* is whatever creature which is hungry and comes to you at that time. All these seek food. The real *athithi* that you get, you do not regard as such. At *kakabali* time, take plenty of cooked rice outside the house and leave it there. Do not shout or call any creature nor drive any away. Do not mind whatever the creature that comes to eat, thereby you get the merit of feeding lakhs of guests."

Such corrective interpretation was extended by Baba even to sacred texts. Thereby not only did he give a better interpretation of them than were given by earlier *savants*, but he put down, too, the pride of learning of the devotee.

Nana Saheb Chandorkar had studied The *Bhagavadgita* with commentaries and was proud of that. Baba, one day, pricked the bubble. Those were days before crowds flocked to Baba.

Baba : Nana, what are you mumbling to yourself?

Nana : I am reciting a verse in Sanskrit from the *Bhagavadgita*.

Baba : Recite it aloud and explain it to me. Nana then recited verse 34 of chapter IV of the *Bhagavadgita* and said,

"Making *sashtanga namaskara*, or prostration, asking the guru for the teaching, serving him, learn what this *jnana* (wisdom of the self) is. Then, those (*jnanis*) that have attained to real

knowledge of the *Sad Vastu* (Reality or Brahman) will give you *upadesh* of *jnana*."

Baba : Nana, is it enough to merely prostrate before the guru?

Nana : I do not know of any other meaning for the words '*pranipata*' than this.

Baba : If '*pari prasna*' means putting questions, what does *prasna* mean?

Nana : The same.

Baba : If *pari Prasna* means the same as *prasna* (question), why did sage Vyasa add the prefix *pari*? Was Vyasa off his head?

Nana : I do not know.

Baba : By *seva* what sort of *seva* (service) is meant?

Nana : Just of the kind we have been rendering you.

Baba : Is it enough to render such service?

Nana : I do not know what more is meant.

Baba : Leave it aside. In the next phrase *upadekshyanti te jnanam* can you read any other word in lieu to *jnanam* (without violence to the metre of the verse)?

Nana : Yes, one can read it as *ajnanam* (i.e., ignorance or nescience). But Sri Sankaracharya's commentary gives no such construction of the verse.

Baba : Never mind it. Is there any objection to using the word *ajnanam* if it gives a better sense?

Nana : No. But I do not understand how to construct the stanza by substituting the phrase *ajnanam* for *jnanam*.

Baba : Again, tell me, why does Krishna direct Arjuna to *jnanis* or *tatwadarsis* when he himself is a *jnani* in fact?

Nana : Yes. He was. But, I cannot make out why he directed Arjuna to other *jnanis*.

Nana's pride of learning was knocked out. Then Baba began to explain the various aspects of the verse thus:

1. It is not enough merely to prostrate before *jnanis* (enlightened Masters). We must make *sarvasya saranagati* (total surrender) to the *Sadguru*

2. Mere questioning is not enough. The attitude is important. The question must not be prompted by any improper motive or attitude viz., to trap the *guru* and to find fault with his wisdom, or simply out of idle curiosity. The attitude must be sincere and serious, and inspired by a desire to achieve *moksha* or spiritual perfection.

3. Seva is not rendering service while still retaining the feeling that one is free to offer or refuse service to the Master. One must feel that he is not the master of his body, that the body is the *guru*'s and exists merely to serve him. If this is done, the *sadguru* will show you what the *jnana* referred to in the previous stanza, is.

How is *jnana upadesh* (i.e., imparting of realization) to be effected by the *guru*? Destroying ignorance is *jnana* (wisdom). Saint Jnaneswar in chapter 18 in the *Jnaneshwari* says, 'Removal of ignorance is like this : O Arjuna, if dream and sleep disappear, you are yourself. It is like that,' He also says : 'Is there anything different or independent in *jnana* besides the destruction of ignorance? Expelling darkness means light. Destroying duality (*dwaita*) menas nonduality (*adwaita*). The disciple, like the *sadguru*, is really the embodiment of *jnana*. The different between the two lies in the attitude, in the high realization, marvelous super – human *Sattha* (Beings) and unrivalled capacity and *aiswarya* (i.e., divine powers). The *Sadguru* is *Nirguna Satchit Ananda* (Attributeless Existence- Consciousness – Bliss). He has indeed taken human form to elevate mankind and raise the world. But his real *nirguna* (attributeless) nature is not destroyed thereby even a bit. His beingness (or reality), divine power and wisdom remain undiminished. The disciple also is in fact of the same *Swarupa* (original nature). But, it is
overlaid by the effects of the *samskaras* (tendencies) of innumerable births in the shape of ignorance which hides from his view that he is *Suddha Chaitanya* (Pure Consciousness). As stated therein, he gets the impression, "I am *jiva*, a creature, humble and poor." The *guru* has to root out these off-shoots of ignorance and has to give an *upadesh* or instruction. To the disciple held spell-bound for endless generations by the ideas of his being a creature, humble and poor, the guru imparts in hundreds of births, the teaching, "You are God, you are mighty and opulent."
Then, he realises a bit that he is God really. That he is the body, that he is a creature (*jiva*) or ego, that God (*Paramatma*) and the world are different from him, is an error inherited by the disciple from innumerable past births. From action based on it, he has derived his joy, sorrow and
mixture of both. To remove this delusion, this error, this root-ignorance, he must start the inquiry, "How did the ignorance arise? Where is it?" And showing him this is called the *guru*'s *upadesh*. The following are the instances of *ajnana*:-

1) 'I am *jiva*, creature.'
2) 'Body is the soul' (I am the body).
3) God, world and *jiva* are different.'
4) 'I am not God'.
5) Not knowing that body is not the soul.
6) Not knowing that God, world and *jiva* are one.

Unless these errors are exposed the disciple cannot learn what are God, *jiva* world and body and how they are interrelated, whether they are different from each other or are one and the same. To teach him these and destroy the ignorance is this instruction in *jnana* or *ajnana*. Why should *jnana* be imparted to the *jiva* (who is) a *jnanamurthi* or an embodiment of knowledge? *Upadesh* is merely to show him his error and destroy his ignorance.

Baba added : '*Pranipata* implies surrender of body, mind and wealth. Then why should Krishna refer Arjuna to other *jnanies*?"

"The *sadbhakta* (true devotee) takes everything to be *Vasudeva* (the Lord of existence) says the *Bhagavadgita* (ch. VII v. 19) i.e., any *guru* will be Krishna to the devotee and *guru* takes the disciple to be *Vasudeva*, and Krishna treats both as his *prana* (Sprit or Life), and *atma* (or Self). As Sri Krishna knows that there are such *bhaktas* (devotees) and *gurus*, he refers Arjuna to them so that their greatness may be known to all."

Bhishma was a widower who lived in Nagpur. Though he was drawn to Baba he did not overcome his notion that Baba was a moslem. As a result he could not take, as many others did, the *padateertha* of Baba (i.e., water that was consecrated by being used to wash Baba's feet). He could not accept, too, the smoking pipe (*chilim*) that Baba offered to devotees.

On a full moon day, Bhishma had a dream in which he saw a man with *tripundra* (or the *vaishnava* mark on his forehead) and performed *puja* (or worship) to the holy man's wooden sandal (*paduka*). The holy one showed him a paper on which a *mantra* was written. It was "*Satchidananda*". As soon as he read it, the *mantra* disappeared from the paper and Bhishma woke up from his dream. When he asked a *sadhu* about his dream and the *mantra* he had seen, the latter told him that it is the name of the *guru* he had seen in his dream and that the name of a perfect guru is also a *mantra*.

After some days Bhishma came to Shirdi. On seeing him Sai Baba smiled and said! "*Jai Satchidananda*" Bhishma immediately realized Baba's omniscience and his transcendence over the narrow barriers of caste and creed. As soon as this realization flashed in Bhishma's mind, Sai immediately nodded and said, 'We are moving all over. There's Ram (or the Spirit of Lord Sri Ram) everywhere". Henceforth Bhishma also started accepting such favours from Baba as the *chilim* from which he smoked.

Sayings of Sai Baba

Baba's Promises

Look to me and I will look to you. Trust the *guru* fully. That is the only *sadhana*. *guru* is all the Gods.

***

Sit quiet. I will do the needful. I will take you to the goal.

***

I will not allow my devotees to fall. Night and day, I think of my people.

***

My tomb will speak and move with those who make Me their sole refuge. I shall be active and vigorous from the tomb also.

***

My name will speak; My *mutti* (dust) will reply.

***

If one meditates on Me, repeats My name, sings My deeds, and is thus transformed into Me, his *karma* is destroyed. I will stay by his side always.

***

I draw My devotee to Me at the time of his death, though he may die a thousand miles away.

***

If one sees Me only, always listens to talk about Me, and perpetually repeats 'Sai' 'Sai' with heart overflowing with devotion and is devoted to Me alone, he will reach God; he need not fear or worry for his body and soul.

***

If one never tastes food before offering it to Me, I am his slave.

***

I will never leave any one in the middle.

***

In the abode of my devotees there will be no dearth of food and clothing. How can I allow My children to fast or starve?

***

I will not allow my men to get away from Me.

Baba about himself

I am the slave of God. God is the Lord and the Master.

***

This is a brahmin, a white brahmin, a pure brahmin. This brahmin will lead lakhs of people to the *subhra marga* and take them to the goal, right up to the end. This is a brahmin *musjid*.

***

Brahman is my father and *maya* is my mother. As they interlocked I got this body. I am *Parvardigar* (God). I live at Shirdi and everywhere.

***

All things are mine. I give everything to everyone.

***

All this universe is in Me.

***

All that you see taken together is Myself. He who thinks that Baba is only at Shirdi has totally failed to see Baba.

***

I look on all equally. Not a leaf moves except by My grace.

***

I get angry with none. Will a mother get angry with her kiddies? Will the ocean send back the water to the several rivers?

***

I do not instruct (anyone) through the ear. Our traditions are different.

Baba's Teachings

Be the real and true sons of the mother (*Dwarakamai*) and fully stock your magazine. What is to become of us (i.e. this bodily life)? Earth will return to earth, and air (breath) will return to the air. This opportunity (human body) will not return.

***

Give up all desires and dwell in your mind upon God-in-all. If the mind is thus concentrated, the goal is achieved.

For *dhyana*, meditate on me as formless, mere *ananda*. If that is hard, then think of my form, just as you see it here. Think of it night and day. With such meditation, the mind dissolves into unity. The difference between subject, object and the act of contemplation will be lost. This results in *chaitanya ghanatha* i.e., *Brahma samarasata*. The *guru's* glance is bread and milk for the disciple.

***

If you make Me the sole object of your thoughts and aims, you will attain *paramartha*, the supreme goal. Look at me with undivided attention; so will I look at you. This is the only truth that my *guru* had taught me. The four *sadhanas* and the six *sastras* are not necessary. With entire confidence, trust your *guru*. That is enough.

***

Stick to your own *guru* with unabated faith, whatever the merits of other *gurus* and however little the merits of your own.

***

It is not *guru* that makes himself your *guru*. It is you who must regard him as your *guru*, i.e., place faith in him. Take a postherd and regard it as your *guru* and see if your goal or aim is reached or not!

***

My *guru*, after depriving me of everything, asked me for two *paise*. I gave them to him. He did not want metallic gifts. What he asked for was (i) faith (*nishta*) and (ii) *saburi* i.e., patience or cheerful endurance.

***

One should not stay in any place where saints (or one's *guru*) are spoken ill of.

***

If anybody is angry with another, he wounds me to the quick. If anyone abuses another, I feel pain. If anyone bravely endures the abuse, I feel highly pleased.

***

If anybody comes and abuses you or punishes you, do not quarrel with him. If you cannot endure it, speak a simple word or two, or else leave the place. But do not battle with him and give tit for a tat. I feel sick and disgusted when you quarrel with others … Do not fight with any; nor scandalise any. When one talks ill of you, pass on unperturbed. His words cannot pierce your body. Others acts will affect them only and not you. It is only your acts that will affect them only and not you. It is only your acts that will affect you. If others hate us, let us take to *nama japa* and avoid them … Do not bark at people; do not be pugnacious. Bear with other's reproach … This is the way to happiness. Let others and the world turn topsy-turvy, but do not mind that; keep on to your own straight course. The world maintains a wall … between oneself and others. Destroy this wall. God is the supreme Lord.

***

Have regard to *rinanubandha*. Whoever or whatever creature comes to you, do not drive it away but receive it with due consideration. Give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and clothes to the naked. Then God will be pleased.

***

If anyone begs anything of you, if you can grant the request or get it granted, do so, Don't say 'No'. If you have nothing to give, give a suave 'no'; do not get angry with him. If you do not like to part with what you have, do not say falsely that you have nothing to give. Decline to give it in polite terms and say that circumstances or desires stand in the way.

***

Work, utter god's name, read scriptures. If you avoid rivalries and bickerings, God will protect you.

***

We should never kill it (a snake). Because it will never kill us unless it is ordered to do so by god. If god has so ordered it, we cannot avoid it.

***

If anyone talks ten words to us, let us answer with one word, if we reply at all. Do not battle with any … Who is whose enemy? Do not say of anyone that he is your enemy. All are one and the same.

***

Among the six *vikaras* (ill-feelings) jealousy is the easiest to conquer. In this *vikara*, there is no question of (actual) gain or loss to ourselves. Jealousy (*matsara*) is the inability to endure another's profit and prosperity. If another gets fortune or power, we cannot put up with it; we scandalize him. When he meets with a loss, we rejoice. But is this good? When that man attains prosperity, what loss have we really suffered? But people do not consider this point. If he benefits, let us consider ourselves benefited; or let us strive to attain equal good. That should be our desire and determination. What has he taken away of ours? Nothing! He received the prosperity that is the result of his *karma*.

***

Never accept gratis the labour (or property) of others. This should be the rule of your life.

***

You must always adhere to truth and fulfill all the promises you make. Have faith and patience. Then I will be always with you wherever you are.

***

Whatever you do, do thoroughly, else do not undertake.

***

Adhere to *vairagya* (dispassion). Women are a great danger to an ascetic. Think of god and kill out the ego. A person that has not overcome lust cannot see god.

***

Do not borrow for celebrating a feast or festival, or for a pilgrimage.

***

Athithi is whatever creature is hungry and comes to you at the lunch time, whether it is a human being or a bird, beast or insect. All these seek food. The real *athithi* that you get, you do not regard as such … At *kakabali* (offering food to crows) time take plenty of cooked rice outside the house and leave it there. Do not shout or call for any creature nor drive any away. Whatever the creature that comes to eat, let not that disturb your mind. You get thus the merit of feeding lakhs of guests!

***

Eat very little. Do not go in for a variety of eatables. A single sort i.e., dish will suffice.

***

The earth bears seeds. Clouds rain on them. The sun sends his rays, and makes them sprout. When these sprout earth, clouds and sun keep on their happy course in all directions. They neither exult at the growth nor deject at the destruction of the sprouts. You should be unaffected like these. If you are, when can sorrow come to you? *Mukti* (or liberation) is this absence of sorrow.

***

We are not to bother ourselves about the beauty or ugliness of the person, but to concentrate solely on God underlying that form.

***

What God gives is never lost and what man gives never lasts.

***

People wrongly think they are different from one another. I am inside you and you are inside me. You continue to think in this way. Then you will realize it!

Miscellaneous

Allah is the protector of the poor. There is nothing besides Him.

***

Never argue. Reply to ten words with one.

***

God is afraid of evil and evil is afraid of God.

***

Whenever ten persons join, there's a rub.

***

Money says, "If you use me well, I shall serve you well."

***

Meal (or food) says, "Cook me well and I shall serve you well."

***

A *yogi* is always better than a *bhogi*.

***

He who, being a king, wears a beggar's robe is good.

***

People have a house each; I have none.

***

The fruit of good is great; of evil, very little.

***

I have to go to thousands of *kos* (about 2 miles) to protect thousands of people.

***

This (i.e. I) is no servant of anyone; this is the slave of *Allah* only.

***

One should be content to remain as God keeps him.

***

One should know the Master. (Else) Why have you come? To collect dung cakes?

***

One should know the inmates of the *wada*.

***

The name of *Allah* is eternal: Allah is all-in-all.

***

Once the strings are entrusted to the *sadguru* there's no cause for grief.

***

There's a low-born one (*mahar*) in the body; he should be evicted.

***

Either we must resort to someone or we must show the path to others.

***

At the Threshold of Eternity

The Clock ticks on

For fifty six long years since 1858 devotees went on pouring in and out of Shirdi for the *darshan* of Sai Baba, "the diamond on the dunghill." Everyday the devotees that flocked there numbered hundreds. What Baba said in the early days of his arrival at Shirdi came literally true. Long before 1908, when Shirdi was still a quiet, nameless village Baba said, "Mansions will rise up in this village. Bigwigs will come. Guns will be fired. Chariots, horses, elephants, all will come. Grand processions will be held." People then laughed at his naive imagination. But around the year 1914 all these came to pass, and Sai Baba's glory was steadily increasing like the glory of the sun towards noon tide. Why wonder if the then famous saint, Sri Madhavanath described Sai Baba as the *Kohinoor* among saints? The joy and zeal of Sai's devotees seemed an unending spring season.

In 1914,Sai Baba made a very casual remark to one of his devotees. He pointed out a piece of waste land of the village to Mrs. Bapusaheb Jog and said, "It is my site; a big mansion will rise up here and we shall live there. Big people would look after me." Mrs. Jog took it as one of the very many inscrutable things he said and hoped that one day she might understand what it meant. Two years passed by and she forgot all about it.

The day advances

It was the Hindu festival of *Vijayadasami* in 1916. Devotees flocked to Shirdi and the whole village looked like a big fair. All the people of the village went in a procession to attend the ceremonial *seemollanghan*, carrying worship-materials like incense, singing and playing instruments. They would cross the border line of the village and then return. (This ceremony was probably a relic of the custom of ancient kings proceeding on wars of conquest across the
borders of their kingdoms on that auspicious day.) In the evening, when all the people were returning,Sai Baba suddenly flew into a wild rage. It was one of Baba's characteristic ways to flare up on such auspicious occasions. He took off his head-dress, *kufni*, and his *langota* (underwear) publicly, tore them up and flung them in the sacred fire. Baba's eyes burned like live coal and his whole body seemed to glow with an uncanny aura. He stood stark naked in the center of the mosque and shouted "You fellows, look at me and decide whether I am a Moslem or a Hindu!" (i.e. whether he was circumsized in the Moslem fashion or not.) None dared to pacify Baba. At last the leper devotee, Bhagoji made bold to approach Baba and succeeded in tying a new *langota* round Baba's waist. Though Baba did not physically obstruct him, he shouted and cursed. Bhagoji gently said, "Baba, today is the holy *seemollanghan*. Why are you angry and why do you frighten people thus?" Striking the ground with his *satka* or staff, he said, "This day is my *seemollanghan*."

Baba did not calm down and the people doubted whether the usual *chavadi* procession could be conducted that day. After an hour or so Baba cooled down, dressed himself up, and resumed his usual seat. A little later, he took part in the procession. What Baba meant when he said, "This day is my *seemollanghan*," none could understand.

The unfinished temple

Sai Baba's ways are in inscrutable. What he decided to accomplish, he never declared it publicly nor did he ask anyone to do so as a favour to him. For *Allah* is his *Malik* i.e., God is his Master and Lord. So Baba's very will had a tremendous influence on the course of events and his spirit being omnipresent and omnipotent, the persons needed for the accomplishment of his project were drawn to him and they would, in course of time, do what Baba, or better perhaps, his Lord had ordained.

Bapusahed Booty, a famous millionaire of Nagpur, was drawn to Baba and was so impressed with his spiritual power that he wished to have a building at Shirdi. One night he was sleeping in Dixit's *wada*. Baba appeared in his dream and ordered him to build a *wada* of his own with a temple in it. Shama was also sleeping there. Booty woke up and found Shama shedding tears and asked him the cause of his grief. Shama said, "Baba appeared in my dream and ordered, distinctly, 'Build the *wada* with the temple. I shall fulfill the wishes of all'. On hearing the words of Baba I was overpowered with emotion."

Bapusaheb was surprised at the precise correspondence between their dreams. He immediately drew up a plan for the *wada* with the co-operation of Shama and Kakasaheb Dixit, and placed it before Baba who blessed it. Work was commenced soon and, under the supervision of Shama, the ground floor, the cellar and the well were completed. Off and on Baba visited the site on his way to or from Lendi and suggested certain improvements. Further work was entrusted to Bapusaheb Jog and, in the course of it, it occurred to Bapusaheb Booty that there should be an open platform in the center of which the idol of Murlidhar (Lord Krishna playing on his flute) could be installed. As usual, when Baba passed by, Shama spoke about it to him. Baba readily gave his consent, but added, "After the temple is complete, I will come and stay there." Staring at the *wada*, he further added,"We shall live, move and play there, embrace each other and be happy."

Then Shama asked Baba whether that was the auspicious moment to commence the work, that being the moment of Baba's consent. Baba affirmed it. Shama immediately fetched a coconut and broke it. Order was placed with sculptors for an idol of Muralidhar. Booty was happy that the work was progressing satisfactorily and that too with the blessings of Sai Baba.

A farewell and cryptic message

Days passed briskly as though they enjoyed the rising glory of Shirdi. The year 1918 commenced as inconspicuously as any other and a few months passed. Uddhavesa Bua, a great devotee, usually visited Sai Baba every fortnight. One day, when he arrived, Baba told him not to take the trouble of visiting him so often thereafter. He said the same to another Mrs. Chandrabai also in July 1918.

Not long after this, one day Sai Baba gave some *poli* with boiled foul to Kasim (the son of Bade Baba) and told him, "Go to Aurangabad and see *fakir* Shamsuddin Mia, give him this money, Rs.250/-, let him do *moulu*, *kowali* and *nyas*." (*Moulu* is the singing of devotional songs about prophet Mohammad; *kowalis* are devotional songs about saints, sung to the accompaniment of *tabla* or drum; *nyas* is feeding the poor people).

Baba then told Kasim to go to another *fakir*, Banne Mia, decorate him first with the garland which Baba had given him. Thereafter Kasim was to tell Banne Mia, "On the ninth day of ninth month, *Allah* himself takes away the lamp which He had lit. Such is *Allah's* mercy" Then Sai Baba gave him Rs.250/- and a garland of *javandi* (chrysanthemum) flowers. But Kasim pleaded that he was a stranger to Aurangabad and that he may not easily contact the said *fakirs*. So Baba asked one Chote Khan to accompany him.

Both Kasim and Chote Khan then started along with a servant by name Ameer. When they arrived at Aurangabad, *fakir* Shamsuddin himself had come to the station. He was enquiring of the passengers, "Who are the guests that have come from *fakir* Sai?" Chote Khan and Kasim were surprised at his precognition and bowed to him in reverence. Then Shamsuddin himself repeated the message of Sai Baba, word by word! Then he led the three guests home and fed them. With the money sent by Sai Baba, he fed a large number of people. He also performed *kowali* and *moulu*. By night all this was completed.

Next day Kasim, Chote Khan and Ameer visited Banne Mia's house. They saw him standing still, with one hand raised and the other held down, evidently in a trance. A few Arabs at the place warned the visitors not to approach the *fakir* when he was in that state as he would be furious with them. So the visitors waited for one long hour but Banne Mia showed no sign of regaining normal awareness. Then Chote Khan mustered all his courage, took the garland which Baba had given them in his hand and put it round the *fakir's* neck. Banne Mia returned to his senses and lowered his raised arm. Chote Khan repeated to him the words of Sai Baba. " Ninth day of the ninth month, *Allah* Himself takes away the lamp which He had lit." On hearing the words, Banne Mia gazed at the sky and tears rolled down his cheek. The party of three left Aurangabad quite thrilled by the happenings. But they could not understand what it was all about.

The Brick Breaks

It was the month of October. One day Baba left the mosque on his daily rounds. The boy Madhav False was sweeping the mosque. He found the brick which was so dear to Baba on the floor. It was, Baba often said, a token of his *guru's* love and his life's companion. To prevent the dust from falling on the holy brick, the boy took it up but suddenly it slipped, fell down and broke into two. The boy was terrified that he might incur Baba's wrath. Instead, when later Baba saw it, he was very much depressed and, said, "It is not the brick that is broken; it is my destiny. It has been my life's companion and I meditated on the Self with its help; It is my very life. It has left me today. I shall not survive it for long."

On the 3rd of October 1918, Raghuvir Purandhare and H.S. Dixit were at Shirdi but Baba sent them away to Bombay. He said to them, "I will go ahead and you will follow me." He gave them permission to go away saying, "My *turbat* (tomb) will speak, my *mutti* (dust) will give you replies; my name will speak".

Baba's health was alright and, "He had spoken these words previously and we did not understand their import", says Dixit.

Shadows of Death

About the same time Ramachandra Patil, a devotee of Sai Baba, became seriously ill, and medical aid proved ineffective. He was, counting his days. Inwardly he went on pleading for his recovery to his last refuge,Sai Baba. One midnight Sai Baba appeared physically before him. Patil held his feet firmly and asked Baba to tell him the exact time of his death. Baba was moved and said, "Don't be anxious; your death-warrant has been withdrawn and you will soon be alright; but I am worried about Tatya Patil's life. He will pass away on the *Vijayadasami* day. Do not divulge this to anyone, not certainly to Tatya; for he'll be frightened." Indeed, Ramachandra Patil quickly recovered, but he was afraid of Tatya's safety. He shared his secret with Bala Shimpe, the tailor.

As the terrible day neared, Tatya fell ill and was bed-ridden. He could not go to *Dwarakamai* for Baba's darshan. Though Baba was also down with fever, Tatya had full faith in Baba that he would save his life. Baba's condition too was fast worsening. Bupusaheb Booty was afraid that if Baba passed away, his *wada* would not be consecrated by the touch of Baba's feet and all his

money, lakhs of rupees, would go a waste. At one stage Tatya felt his end was certain. He was getting *udi* regularly from Baba. One day Baba summoned Tatya to the mosque for lunch. As Tatya could not walk, he was carried thither by a fellow devotee. Then Baba gave him a little rice boiled in milk, which he ate with great difficulty. Baba looked enquiringly at Tatya, and the latter burst into tears. Though he himself was ailing, Baba applied *udi* to Tatya's forehead and said, "Tatya, at first I got two swings ready for both of us. But now I've changed my mind. I don't want to take you now. I am going alone. Go home!" Then Baba gave him *udi* and Tatya was taken home.

During this period of his illness, Baba made one Mr.Vaghe read out to him the sacred book, '*Ramavijaya*' once in a week, second time, in three days and the third round was also finished. When the man was very much exhausted Baba let him go and observed silence for most of the day.

Seven days before *Vijayadasami*, a band of *fakirs* arrived at the mosque. They brought with them a tiger chained to a cart. It was ill and was very furious with pain and suffering. They purchased it from a circus company and were collecting money by exhibiting it in villages. They hoped that Baba would rid the creature of its suffering so that they could sell it at a higher price back to the circus men. 'I shall at once rid it of its suffering; bring it here' said Baba. The *fakirs* untied it and led it into the front yard of the mosque. The creature climbed up the steps, and stared at Baba as though struck by his radiant face, struck the ground thrice with its tail and fell dead. Indeed, it was released from bondage.

It was still four days for the holy *Vijayadasami*, the day which Sai Baba described as the day of his '*seemolanghan*'. Mrs. Andu Marwadi, one of the local devotees of Sai Baba, was sitting in front of him.Sai Baba said, "Bai, I am tired of being in *Dwarakamai* and *chavadi*. I'll go over to the (Booty's) *wada* where big people will look after me". At that time Baba's health was far from satisfactory. He stopped his morning trips to Lendi and his begging rounds and only sat in the mosque. His closer devotees like Kakasaheb Dixit and Booty remained with Baba all the time and were dining daily in the *musjid* itself.

At last the fatal day of *Vijayadasami*(15th of October, 1918) dawned. Ramachandra Patil and Bala Shimpe knew what was in store for Tatya. News came that his pulse was getting weaker. Baba too was also very ill and weak. He sat up in the morning and called Mrs. Lakshmi Bai Shinde near him, gave her Rs.5/- at first and then Rs.4/- and told her to preserve them. Then, after the morning *arti*, Baba asked all the devotees to go for lunch. Just a few of the devotees like Mrs. Lakshmi Bai Shinde, Bhagoji, Bayyaji, Bala Shimpe and Nanasaheb Nimonkar stayed with Baba.

He told them that he did not feel well there in the mosque and asked them to take him to the *dagdi*(stone)*wada* of Booty where he would be alright. Saying these last words, he leaned on Bayyaji's (Bayyaji Apaji Patel) body and breathed his last. Bhagoji noticed it and told Nanasaheb Nimonkar. Nanasaheb then brought a little water and poured it in Baba's mouth but it all came out. Then Nanasaheb burst out weeping.

It was a terrible blow to the countless devotees and the whole village of Shirdi felt like a corpse with its spirit gone. The news spread fast and the whole village rushed to the mosque weeping and crying.

Strangely, Tatya recovered very rapidly and could sit up by noon. Devotees felt that Sai made the supreme sacrifice of his life to save Tatya from certain death. For did not Sai say that he would even give his own head to save his devotee?

A Controversy

Soon the matter of the last rites of Baba became the subject of a great controversy. One section of devotees which included Kushalchand said that the body must be buried in an open plot according to the moslem custom, and the expenses be borne by those who had been benefiting by his daily bounties. The other group could think of no other way than enshrining his body in Booty's *wada* as per Baba's wish.

The *mamlatdar* of Kopergaon who was there decided to gather the signatures of either sections. Those who wanted Baba's wish to be carried out were in the majority and so it was finally decided that the body should be enshrined in an under-ground cellar beneath the elevated platform in Booty's *wada*. In the place of the idol of Muralidhar, the photograph of Sai Baba was placed which was later replaced by the present marble statue in 1956. The last rites were conducted by Balasaheb Bhate and Upasani Maharaj.

One question has remained unexplained. Baba indicated that the proposed shrine of Muralidhar would be his final resting place and said that big people would take care of him there. How did it come to pass?

By 'big people' Baba can hardly be taken to have meant 'big' in a worldly, monetary sense. For he was a *fakir* to the core who cared two pins for rupees. Even if he did, Booty is not a small man by any standard. A building worth a few lakhs in those times, when Indian money had much greater value than today, was no small matter. Besides, it was not just a matter of rupees. A mansion that was to be a temple of Muralidhar was made the temple of *Sadguru* Sainath and no greater honour can be conceived for a *saint* or *guru*.

Taking the word 'big' to mean 'of great spiritual stature', Upasani Baba was a 'Maharaj' even as Sai Baba was a 'king' (in the sense in which the Christ was called the 'King'). As will be seen in a later section,Sai Baba himself personally alchemised Upasani Sastry into Upasani Baba Maharaj and openly announced that there was no difference between himself and Upasani Baba. Some people, of course brush aside even the statement of Sai Baba and look upon Upasani Baba as an inferior one - yet they believe that they are devotees of Sai Baba as though the fact of one of the two being a *sadguru* precludes the other of it! To have a *sadguru* of his own stature honour his mortal remains – what greater honour can anyone have and from what greater soul? In fact, in the annals of spiritual history we hardly have a parallel. The Buddha, Jesus, not even Lord Krishna and Rama had it. The nearest parallel we have is in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's mortal remains being honoured by his devotee Swami Vivekananda.

As if this were not enough, we have already noted how great *fakirs* like Shamsuddin Mia honoured the proclamation of the date of Baba's *samadhi* with *moulu*, *kawali* and *nyas*; we also noted how a fakir like Banne Mia shed tears on hearing Baba's message.

There is still one more instance to be mentioned.

Gurugobind Maharaj of Khandesh was a very great saint of that time. He was even thought of being a *gurubandhu* (literally a spiritual relation through the *guru*, i.e., a co-disciple) of Sainath Maharaj. This great saint was laid up with high fever on the *Vijayadasami* day, the day of Sai Baba's *mahasamadhi*. His disciples even feared that his end was near. On that day Sri Gurugobind told his disciples and devotees, "The *jyothi* (light) of a great *mahatma* will soon merge in the Moon. Hanuman says 'You be' ". When his devotees thought that their Guru was referring to his own impending death, he corrected them saying that he was referring to Sri Sainath of Shirdi.

One of these devotees of Sri Gurugobind, Madan Patil, immediately wrote letters to as many devotees of Sai Baba as he knew to rush to Shirdi to have a final glimpse of the body that was Sai. And he wrote simply out of his faith in the infallibility of Sri Gurugobind's words. On the third day after this, he received a wire from Shirdi that Sai Baba took *samadhi* precisely on the day pointed out by Sri Gurugobind. Then Gurugobind made all his disciples take bath and then told them that the *jyothi* (divine flame) had merged in the Moon. One Kesav Datt Maharaj was specially sent by Sri Gurugobind with the instruction, "Go and visit the place of the Moon".

Samadhi or death?

Mrs. M.W.Pradhan records her experience:- "The night after Baba's departure, I saw his body in a dying condition in my dream and said, 'Baba is dying'. Baba replied, 'People do not talk of saints as dying, but as taking *samadhi*'. His body was still. People were mourning. I felt sad. I woke up at 12.30 midnight. In the morning, we got from Anna Chinchinikar, a post-card that Baba passed away at 3.00 p.m., on holy *Dassera*, 15.10.1918".

True. In the spiritual lore of Hindus (and of Moslems) saints are not spoken of as dead, but are said to take *samadhi*. But what is the difference? "Did not Baba die?" you may ask. Did not Jesus Christ die? Yes, but he again rose from the dead, and thereby his 'death' was in fact a triumph over death. And that is real taking of *samadhi* and so did Baba take it.

The most prominent feature of Baba's spiritual perfection is that even when he was in his body he was not really in his body, nor was he his body in the sense in which we are our bodies. "He who thinks that Baba is at Shirdi has totally failed to see Baba", "Iam with you wherever you be." " I am not at Shirdi only but in all creatures." Thus again and again Baba declared and proved how he was the black dog, *sudra*, the *bhil*, the photograph, the various *sadhus*, *fakirs*, saints, and the various deities. When visitors came from distant places, Baba would recount their whole history to the minutest details of their mental states, feelings and thoughts as though they were his own. Thus, if the separation of body and soul alone be the essence of death, we have to admit that Baba never lived, even when he moved amidst us and acted! If we also add that absence of awareness and the power to speak, act, appear and move about are the real attributes of death, then Sai Baba was alive but in a quite different way from us. And he is so even now, as

is amply proved by the experiences of innumerable devotees.

If death was not real death for him, what was birth to Him? That is the crux of the problem. For as the *Bhagavadgita* rightly points out, everything that has a beginning, a birth, must have an end, a death; and that which is without death is also without birth. The former is the body; the latter is the Self (as distinguished from the ego which is the false identification of the two). Common mortals identify themselves with their bodies. He who has extricated himself from the former condition and attained the latter is the perfect saint. That is Christhood; that is the kingdom of Heaven; the release from 'sin' the wages of which is 'death'.

The full implication of this logically implies that the Spirit not merely transcends the body but thereby the saints can resurrect, appear (and disappear) physically in any place, or in more places and forms than one at the same time. Then where arises the question of the loss or death of either the spirit or of the body? Yes, saints, are rightly said to take *samadhi* and not die.

This is not a vain philosphy to Baba as it is to us. For Baba himself said that even at his 'birth' he knew that he was the eternal spirit which does not come into being i.e., which is not subject to birth. Then how could he have death as we understand it? That his perfection far preceded the birth of his present physical frame is also witnessed by his innumerable references to his protection of several persons in their previous lives in the capacity of an all powerful Godman.

But how did Baba realize his Self, unfettered by his body? By his *guru's* grace. For, he once said that his *murshad* freed him from the limitation of his body and made him realize that he was not his body. But when did he learn it? Again, in the light of his statement quoted earlier, it could only have happened in some earlier birth, so that even by the time of his assuming the present physical body, he conquered both birth and death. Though he was 'born', his birth is not anything like our birth. So his death cannot be death as we understand it. How complete his mastery over birth and death is can be seen from the following incident:

Thirty two years before his *mahasamadhi*, i.e., in 1886, on a full moon day, Baba was suffering from a severe attack of asthma. On that day at about 10 p.m., he called Mahalsapathy to him and said, "I am going to see *Allah mia*. Protect my body for three days. If I return to it, it's alright; if I do not, bury my body in that open land and fix two flags there to mark out the place". So saying, Baba fell down unconscious. His breath stopped and also his pulse. All the people that got the news of Baba's sudden death gathered there and wanted to hold an inquest and bury the body in the place chosen by Baba. But Mahalsapathy prevented this and held on to Baba's directions. With Baba's body on his lap he sat for full three days, guarding it. On the third day, at about 3 p.m. Baba showed signs of life. His breathing commenced; the abdomen began to sway to his inhalations and exhalations. He opened his eyes, stretched his limbs and sat up. (It is interesting to see that Jesus too rose up from the dead on the third day.) What is death to such a one?

Even years after his final *samadhi* there are innumerable instances of Baba exercising his power, even as he did when he was in his fleshly tabernacle i.e., to appear physically in the form of *fakirs* and *sadhus* and disappear as suddenly and mysteriously. Besides, when he was 'alive' at will he could appear before his devotees in a dream or vision as he did to Booty and Shama

simultaneously. The same he did after his *samadhi* too. These latter instances we shall note here, leaving the former to a later chapter.

First is the case we have quoted at the very beginning of this chapter. Again the day next to holy *Vijayadasami* (on which Baba laid down his body), i.e., on Wednesday morning, Baba appeared to Laxman Mama Joshi in his dream and, drawing him aside by his hand said, "Get up soon; Bapusaheb thinks that I am dead and so he won't come. You do the worship and the *kakad* (morning) *arti*."

Laxman daily worshipped Baba before worshipping the other village deities. With much faith in Baba he came up with the *puja* materials and, not minding the protests of *moulvis*, did the *puja* and offered the *kakad arti* to the body and went away. Then, at noon Bapusaheb Jog came with all others and went through the noon-*arti* as usual.

On the day following his *mahasamadhi* i.e., on 16th October, Baba appeared to Das Ganu is his dream at Pandharpur and said, "The *musjid* has collapsed; all the oil men and grocers of Shirdi have teased me a lot; so I left the place. I therefore came to inform you here; go there quickly and cover me with *bhakkal* flowers." The information that Das Ganu got through a letter from Shirdi only testified the truth of Baba's statement. So he came to Shirdi with all his disciples and started *bhajan* and *kirtan* and went on singing throughout the day before Baba's *samadhi* which he garlanded. Later he fed a large number of people in Baba's name.

A little later, Baba appeared in the dream of another lady and told her to send the *pitamber* (light yellow silk *dhoti*) in her trunk to cover his *samadhi*. So she did. When the thirtieth day after the *samadhi* neared, he appeared in the dream of yet another devotee and told him to celebrate the day. So the latter did feed many people on that day. Thus Baba rightly declared, "I shall be alive and vigorous from the tomb also." "Even after my *mahasamadhi*, I shall be with you the moment you think of me, at any place."

And he stands by his word even today. And that is taking *samadhi*.

"It is Death that's dead, not He!"

The Off-shoots of Sai Baba

The achievement of a saint or a God-man is gauged by the number and greatness of the God-men he has made. And Sai Baba has amply fulfilled his promise, "This is a pure brahmin, a white brahmin. This brahmin shall lead lakhs of people to the *subhramarga*. This is a brahmin musjid."

"Guru is God or the Self. First a man prays to God to fulfil his desires; then a time comes when he does not pray for the fulfilment of a desire but for God Himself. So God appears to him in some form or other, human or non-human, to guide him as a guru in answer to his prayer."

"He who has earned the grace of his guru will undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaw will never be allowed to escape."

These words of Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi are a graphic summary of how Sri Sai Baba transformed Sri Kasinath Govind Upasani Sastry into Sadguru Upasani Maharaj, the famous saint of Sakori. The whole process of this spiritual alchemy is thus a spectacle of Sai Baba's efficacy as a *Sadguru*, a witness to what he does to one who surrenders to him completely.

Upasani Baba Maharaj

Kasinath was born on 5th May, 1870 as the second of five sons in a Maharashtra family of priests famous for its piety and learning. He was backward in studies and the harshness of teachers created in him a permanent aversion for the school. Endowed with a sturdy physique, he appeared to have had a great disregard and detachment for his own body. As he grew up he was more and more attracted by the spiritual side of life and observed all the austerities enjoined by scriptures meticulously, *sandhya*, (twilight meditation), worship of Sri Rama and Maruthi, *yoga asanas* and breath-control , and reciting *Vishnusahasranama*. He often resorted to the burial ground for his devotional practices. At the same time Kasinath was painfully conscious of his uselessness to his family as a bread-earner and opposed all proposals of marriage. But his elders forcibly married him to a girl of eight, named Durgabai, in the hope that it would render
Kasinath more responsible in his ways. Married life only further hurt his self-esteem. One morning he deserted his home, and reached Nasik, eighty miles from his home, on foot. But soon he regretted causing anxiety to his aged parents and so wrote home. Two months later, a letter alleging his mother's illness brought him back.

Not long after, his wife died but soon he was forcibly remarried. He felt miserable and again left on his travels. Mostly he was in Pune where he lived by rendering menial service or begging. He often tried in vain to quench his hunger with water and margosa leaves and slept on bare earth. But all the while he sought the company of holy *sadhus*. Then one of these, a celebate *sadhu*, impressed upon him the merits of celibacy and devotion to Lord Siva. In one of his moods of depression, an old Marathi lady had taught him the verse which meant, "Maintain your life, even with water and other things, if needed. Love God and bear your lot. Be patient in misfortunes and spurn the smiles of fortune. Break the bonds of desire. (But) Never leave the company of saints."

After sometime he made for his home town to Satana. On the way he saw in a dense wood, a hill with a cave, very difficult of access. He decided to enter the same and there fast unto death. He climbed a neighbouring tree and leapt from its branch into it.

The cave was four or five feet high, nine feet long and four feet broad. He devoted his time for the repetition of the Lord's name. Soon he attained a high state of mystical trance, i.e.,*samadhi*. When he woke up from it he was surprised to see someone standing by and flaying him alive. His skin was coming off like the slough of a serpent. The shock of the vision had brought him to normal consciousness more fully and he found that there was no one there and his skin was intact. He experienced a keen thirst. His throat was too parched to cry for water and there was none to help him even if he did. His body was too stiff to move. Only his right forearm was free. He again fell into a trance state. Soon there were clouds and a heavy downpour. Water streamed near him in the cave, by the time he regained normal consciousness. With his right hand he slaked his limbs till they were restored to their natural condition.

Three days passed when he had a vivid vision: Thirsty, he was approaching a stream for water. Two figures, a Moslem and a Hindu, were by his side. They pulled off his old skin and displayed to him a shining body within and said, "Why do you want to die? We are behind you and we won't let you die."

He realized that fate would not let him die. Weak as he was, he crept to the edge of the cave, and moved along one of the branches of the banyan tree, swung himself by it and dropped down on his legs. Surprisingly enough, even this fall from such a height in such a weak condition of the body left him unhurt except for a small swelling and pain. He crawled for five hours to reach the huts of tribals two miles away. They fed him with milk and wild rice. When he was a bit strong, he sold fuel at Nasik and gave the money to the tribals. He returned home on 22nd of July, 1890 and learned that he was in deep *samadhi* state for many months on end.

Within three weeks of his arrival at home, his father died on 8th August,1890 and he performed the last rites. His grand-father was laid up and young Kasinath had to attend on him and this inspired him to take to the medical profession. His grand-father passed away in 1891, leaving his family in debts. They had to live henceforth by the generosity of late Sri Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak. At this time Kasinath's second wife died and Kasinath left for Sangli to learn medicine and Sanskrit. Later he became a prosperous doctor in Amraoti but his spiritual discipline continued. He invested his savings on a huge estate which resulted in a total loss and he was constrained to return to Amraoti. But his practice did not revive and so he gave it up and set on, with his third wife, on pilgrimage.

The couple visited a temple of Gowri Shankar in the midst of a jungle on the banks of river Narmada and worshipped the *omkaralinga* there. Kasinath started practicing breath-control. Once he lost all consciousness and his wife was terrified. She revived him by splashing water on him, but his breathing could not be restored to normalcy. Even when he massaged certain muscles of his body, he could only breathe with difficulty. But off and on it used to be suspended, especially when he tried to sleep or eat. One visible effect of this trouble was that his belly grew big. He went to doctors in Nagpur and Dhulia in search of a remedy in vain. Finally he concluded that only a great *yogi* could cure him and started in search of one in April, 1911.

Yogi Kulkarni of Rahuri received Kasinath worshipfully and assured him that he had attained a great state in *yoga* practice and asked him to see *aulia* (a powerful Moslem saint) Sai Baba at Shirdi who is above distinctions of caste or creed. But the brahminic pride of Kasinath searched for a *Hindu yogi* instead. An old man met Kasinath on the road to Rahuri and told him, "Drink water as hot as your tongue can bear. Avoid cold water; and you will recover!" Kasinath brushed it aside and started on his trek to a *Hindu Yogi*, Phatak Maharaj at Moregaon. On the way, at Jejuri, he suddenly gave up all concern for his body and spent a week in *samadhi* in a lonely place. On the eighth day, when he made for a stream for drinking water, the old man that met
him at Rahuri suddenly appeared before him and admonished him for neglecting his advice. He commanded him to take hot water in the nearby village and vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared. Amazed at the incident, Kasinath heeded the warning and, within three weeks his condition improved greatly. But fearing a possible relapse of the trouble he visited Sri Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaonbet, a famous saint. The Maharaj received Kasinath with honour and gave him betel to chew and told him that the later was 'thouroughly lined with gold internally and externally' (i.e., he attained a high state in *yoga* and he needed nothing). These words were too mystifying for Kasinath and so he revisited the Maharaj the next day. Again he was told that his business was already finished and that there was no need for him to visit the Maharaj again and again.

However, Kasinath, on his way home, visited Yogi Kulkarni again, who repeated his earlier direction. Accordingly, he reached Shirdi on 27th June, 1911. In a trice his complaint vanished! After two days he sought Baba's permission to return home. Baba put him in a tight corner by asking him either to stay away at Shirdi for good, or to return there again after eight days. Kasinath was not prepared for either of the alternatives. Baba then declared, "Well, go if you like. I will see what I can do."

Kasinath was mystified to see that during the next week, instead of rushing home, he had been slowly moving about within fourteen miles of Shirdi. On the eighth day, at Kopargaon, pilgrims to Shirdi pressed him to take them to Sai Baba and he did. On seeing him Sai Baba smiled and asked him how long it was since he (Kasinath) took leave; Kasinath humbly conceded that it was the eighth day! Sai then ordered him to go and stay in the building built for devotees there. Probably Baba's powerful will had a subtle effect on Kasinath. For, contrary to all his plans, he did meekly obey Baba's order.

In course of time, the experiences of various devotees of Sai Baba cultured faith and devotion in Kasinath. The finishing touch was however given by Baba on one day. Kasinath was sitting in the mosque along with other devotees. Sai then told the gathering, with a smile on his lips and glancing at Kasinath off and on, that once he saw a pregnant woman who did not deliver the child even after years of pregnancy; he later advised her to drink only hot water which will help her in an easy delivery. The lady ignored the advice and approached a stream for drinking water; Sai Baba, fearing that 'she' would unnecessarily 'die' along with all the infants in her belly, again approached her, admonished her to take hot water from the neighbouring village. So she did and so she got relief thenceforth.

Kasinath realized that it was, indeed, his story and the old man who advised him to drink hot water once at Rahuri and later at Jejuri was Sai Baba himself! He realized the truth of Sai Baba's characteristic statement; "I will not allow my devotees to fall; night and day I think of them" and "I will never leave anyone in the middle". To clear the remaining doubts in Kasinath's mind, even while he was so wondering, Sai Baba addressed him thus; "There is *rinanubandha* (connection through former *karma*) between us. Our families have been closely connected for thousands of years. So we are one." Tears of gratitude rolled from Kasinath's eyes.

Once Sai Baba said, "Two birds lived on a tree on the verge of a well. One of them fell down and was about to be drowned. The second one jumped down and saved it, thought it nearly lost its own life in the effort." This closely corresponds to what Baba said to Sri Upasani's brother.

The latter visited Tapovanam at Rishikesh in 1898. There he met a *sadhu* who said, "There was a tree. Two persons went up. One fell down. The other went up!" When asked of the significance of his statement, the *sadhu* simply said, 'You will know'. In 1912 Upasani's brother visited Sai Baba at the mosque and Sai Baba literally repeated the same statement. Thereby Upasani's brother realized that Sai Baba must have appeared before him at Rishikesh in the form of that *sadhu*, but he did nothing more to know the details of the incident of the two birds or two persons.

Kasinath stayed in the village shrine of Khandoba and kept alone most of the time. Sai Baba said, "He must sit quiet in the temple doing nothing." He told Kasinath, "Have nothing to do with anybody. Your future is excellent. No other has such a future."

In short, Sai Baba showed a marked favour to Kasinath and this made several of the devotees jealous. But the annoyance caused by the jealous devotees of Sai made Kasinath long to go away from Shirdi. He sought Sai's permission through Shama again and again. But Baba always said that he had to 'clear his account' with Kasinath and did not permit him to go. He told the devotees, "Everything I have got has been completely given to him." He also told Kasinath finally one day in 1911, "Hereafter you need not go to me frequently. Come to me only occasionally. You should not however, talk to me. Nor will I talk to you. After four years you will have the full grace of Lord Khandoba."

Why did Baba say that Kasinath would win the grace of god Khandoba and not 'my grace'? Baba always identified himself, spiritually, with the chosen deity of a devotee. During the early years of his wandering, Kasinath was impressed with devotion to Lord Siva and the ideal of total celebacy. So Baba had put it this way. Baba's words imply that He is the supreme Self which answers the devotee or a seeker in the form he chose as the object of his devotion.

Kasinath still longed to return to his sweet wife and petitioned to Baba occasionally for his permission, but Baba somehow managed that it did not come off. In January, 1912 Kasinath's third wife died and he was very much upset. Baba consoled him saying that he himself took care of the peace of her soul and added, "I am fully responsible for you."

The period of four years was very eventful to Kasinath. It is punctuated with the bitterest tears and the sweetest joy. Once, for example, Sai said to Kasinath, "I shall be coming there (to the

Khandoba temple), but if I go over there, will you recognize me?" Kasinath used to cook his own food, offer it first to Sai Baba and then partake of it. One day, a black dog followed him and craved for the food but Kasinath thought of feeding it only after offering it to Sai. On his arrival at the mosque Sai said, "Why come so far? I was there!" Kasinath could not understand it. Sai explained, "I sat there looking at you till you finished cooking."

Kasinath said, "But there was none except a black dog!"

"Yes, I was that!" replied Sai Baba.

Kasinath decided not to repeat the error of not recognizing Baba when he visited him. But the next day he found a *sudra* (low caste) beggar staring at his broth yearningly as he cooked. Being caste conscious, Kasinath drove him away with harsh words. But when he brought the meals to Sai, the latter was furious and refused to accept the offering because he (in the form of the *sudra*) was driven away without food. The words of Sai, "Wherever you may look, I am there", were deeply impressed on Kasinath's heart. Henceforth he lived in a keener awareness of the omnipresence of his *Guru* God.

There were bitter times too. For instance Sai Baba took away all the money that Kasinath had brought with him demanding *dakshina* from him repeatedly. His clothes became rags in course of time, but Sai never allowed him to put on the new cloths which his brother had sent him. Baba was teaching him practically the significance of his own statement, "What man gives never lasts; what God gives never wears out."

Kasinath sometimes experienced extreme aversion for food and he used to throw it away to dogs and other creatures. Sometimes he saw Sai Baba when the latter went out of the *Dwaraka Mai* on his daily rounds. Baba always assured him, "I am always with you, you need not fear anything. The more you suffer now, the more excellent and happy your future will be." Pivoted on such trust in his *guru*, he stopped eating altogether for one year during 1913-14. Strangely enough, though he was lean and without food, he was doing hard work like grinding or working in road- laying or ploughing fields! On a full moon day in July-August, 1913 Sai Baba indicated the nearing completion of his spiritual dispensation of Kasinath when he ordered his devotees to worship the latter in the temple even as Sai Baba was worshipped in the mosque.

The spiritual training Sai Baba gave to Kasinath was mainly through a number of significant visions which served in wiping out human fragilities like lust, greed, etc., from his heart. For instance, once Kasinath had a vision that he entered a house. Sai Baba who was seated inside beckoned to him with a view to whisper some instruction into the former's ear. When he was about to do accordingly, a shabby counterpart of Kasinath himself pulled him away and asked him not to heed Sai's words. After repeated warnings to the shabby figure Sai Baba beat him, took him to a stream and burnt him on a pyre. Then Sai returned and told him that the shabby figure was the personification of his (Kasinath's) sins; "You are now free from sin. By our united effort much is to be accomplished. "You will yourself understand everything without any word from me." Then Sai Baba's *guru* prostrated before Kasinath to the latter's amazement. Thus ended the vision, proclaiming the flowering of Kasinath into a full-fledged saint, Sri Upasani Baba Maharaj. Similarly, on another occasion, Sai Baba showed the glowing person of Upsani

Maharaj's spiritual glory to him. Upasani Maharaj then asked Sai, "If this figure is the form of my virtue and if the one you destroyed earlier was of my sins, who, indeed, am, I?" Sai said, "You are beyond these two; that which constitutes 'me' constitutes 'you'. There is no difference between you and I."

This transformation of Kasinath into Upasani Baba was not a mere subjective experience. His inner glory started revealing itself in a large number of miracles which his visitors had witnessed. Sitting in the temple, for instance, he would describe everything that happened at the mosque. He knew the innermost thoughts of all and their past, present and future. One Narahari from Nevasa visited Baba with a few others. But he did not bow to him as he seemed a Moslem *fakir*. Sai glared at him and he at once left the mosque. He learned that a Hindu *Sadhu*, Sri Upansani Baba, was at Khandoba temple and visited him. When he bowed to him, Sri Upasani Baba drew his feet back saying, accusingly, "Oh! You are a high caste Hindu and Sri Sai is a Moslem to whom you should not bow down! Then what have you got to do with me?" Narahari realized his folly. Sri Upasani and Sai Baba are one and the one knew what was happening to the other every minute!" In short, Sai Baba moulded Upasani Maharaj into his own likeness and once told him. "You must plant trees that will live for many centuries – from which people will derive benefit", implying that thousands will spiritually benefit through him.

At the end of three years of his discipleship in July 1914, one night Sri Upasani Maharaj took silent leave of his Master and left for Nagpur. He later went to Kharagpur, Varanasi, Allahabad and other places where, crowds flocked to him. Countless miracles manifested themselves to his devotees. He visited Baba in the years 1915 and 1916 and, in 1917, he finally settled at Sakori, a hamlet a few miles from Shirdi. Sakori today is a great spiritual center. Sri Upasani attained *maha samadhi* on 24.12.1941. A big *samsthan* (or institution) has taken shape there to meet the needs of the seekers who go there for Light.

Meher Baba

In the blossoming of Sri Upasani Baba we find the best demonstration and instance of the truth of Sai Baba's promise to humanity. "This brahman shall lead lakhs of people to the *subhra marga*."

The quickest and perhaps the only feasible way to do so is to make as many as possible of perfect saints of his own stature so that each would in his turn, become another center for a similar chain of spiritual evolution of mankind. While he established Upasani Maharaj as the luminary in the spiritual firmament, this off-shoot of Sai's force, in his turn, established another powerful spiritual center in Sri Meher Baba.

There is prevalent, a misconception that when a Sai Baba has given away all his spiritual treasure to Upasani Maharaj or Upasani Maharaj to a Meher Baba, the giver himself loses all his spiritual power and becomes inferior to the receiver of it. This has created an unhealthy sense of rivalry between devotees of the Masters which is harmful to whatever spiritual seedlings have been planted in their hearts by their *sadgurus*. Nothing can be far from truth; for spiritual power increases by being given, in contrast to the material wealth which is lost by giving. The truth is that when a perfect master like Sai Baba makes another his equal, the two become one in spirit

and the same Universal Power of God can be contacted through either of them. For instance, if a Hindu visitor to *Dwaraka Mai* has an inhibition that Sai Baba was a Moslem and so not worthy of worship, Upasani Maharaj, even while sitting in the Khandoba temple, feels the pinch of it and refuses to accept the worship from that devotee till he overcomes that inhibition and worships Sai Baba freely. The phenomenon operates the other way too. Sai Baba did order his devotees to go and worship Upasani Baba also in the Khandoba temple. "That which constitutes I, constitutes you. There is no difference between you and I", said Sai Baba to Upasani.

Indeed this spiritual identity extends to all realized saints. Any devotion or disrespect shown to one of them amounts to doing the same to all others and to all their spiritual descendants.

We have a parallel anecdote in Islamic lore. God, after having created Man, commanded the angels to pay homage to him (Man). Many of them did so; for they know that in rendering obeisance to man they were obeying God's order. Secondly it constitutes acceptance of the fact that God can make any of His creatures as great as He wants to, by His mere will. Some angels of course did not obey the Lord on the ground that Man was an inferior creature being made of clay, while they themselves were superior residents of heaven, and they were made of fire. These angels had to pay for disobeying Lord's command. The homage paid to Upasani, if it is true homage, does not imply disregard for Sai Baba. Quite the contrary!

Merwan was the second son of Sheriarji, a devout Parsi. Sheriarji was a great seeker after Truth who wandered as recluse for eight years in Persia and for ten years in India. Having learnt in a dream that he was not destined to get what he wanted, he yielded to the persuasion of his sister and married Shirin Banu in 1879. His second son, Merwan was born in Pune on 25th of February 1894. Strangely enough, even as a boy Merwan was found sitting alone for hours in the Tower of Silence where the Zoroastrains leave their dead to be consumed by birds. At school he was an active boy, interested in sports and a keen lover of poetry and music and a good conversationalist.

One day in May 1913, Merwan was riding his bicycle when an old Moslem woman saint named Babajan beckoned to him and when he approached her, she embraced him and kissed him on the forehead, between the eyes.

Hazarat Babajan, as she was called, was a great Sufi saint. She fled from her home in Baluchistan to avoid marriage and led the life of a wandering ascetic in search of God. After some time, she met her master who made her perfect. She lived in the Punjab till about 1908 when she moved on to Bombay. In the fullness of her realization she used to say that she was God for which some orthodox soldiers of the Baluchi regiment buried her alive as a heretic. Some years later the same soldiers found her very much alive by the side of a road in Pune. They bowed to her in amazement. This incident spread her fame far and wide.

Soon after his encounter with her, Merwan visited Hazrat Babajan everyday. One day, she said, of him to the other devotees, "This child of mine will one day cause a great awakening in the world and would do immense good to mankind". No sooner did he return home than he began to experience strange 'electric shocks' all over his body and then became unconscious. For three days he was like that, speechless and not seeing anything even though his eyes were wide open.

Later he slightly regained his consciousness. Change of residence or medical aid could not help him. But during the course of one year he recovered much and felt the need to find someone who could help him to gain complete recovery. An impulse to travel extensively added to this. Accordingly, he visited places and incidentally he also visited spiritual masters like Sri Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaonbet and Hazrat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur. Later he visited Sri Sai Baba at Shirdi who directed him to Sri Upasani Maharaj.

At that time Sri Upasani Maharaj was at Shirdi and was passing through the climax of his spiritual progress when he seemed a lunatic to common folk. In December 1915, when Merwan approached Sri Upasani, the latter grew furious, and flung a stone at him. The stone hit Merwan at the exact spot where Babajan had kissed him. This marked the second turning point in Merwan's metamorphosis into Meher Baba. Merwan henceforth visited Upasani Maharaj off and on. Though as a normal lad he had to obey his mother's demands that he should run a tea shop, his devotional life continued and even swallowed up the worldly occupation.

In 1921, he stayed with Sri Upasani Maharaj for six months. Most of the time Sri Upasani was alone with him and both were silent. Towards the end of the period, Upasani Maharaj declared to his devotees even as Sai Baba did "I have given my charge to Merwan. This boy will move the world. I have made Merwan perfect."

The later life of Meher Baba was characterized by unbroken silence, his contacting a large number of god-intoxicated saints in various countries. Off and on he went into seclusion and fasted. He distinguished himself in his service of the lepers whom he bathed with his own hands and clothed. He met his *guru* Sri Upasani Maharaj again on 17th October 1941, prostrated before him and spent half an hour with him alone. This was their last meeting before Sri Upasani Maharaj left off his body on 24th December, 1941.

Meher Baba himself took *mahasamadhi* in 1968. He has a very large band of devotees. The words of Meher Baba relevant to this context are, "You will never be able to understand thoroughly how great Sai Baba is. He is the very personification of Perfection. If you know him as I know him, you would call him, the Master of Creation."

Sri Sai Sharananandaji

Shri Sai Sharananandaji was an ardent devotee of Sai Baba and was immensely blessed by him. He is revered as a *Satpurusha* by a large number of people. The writer of this book had the good fortune of being blessed by him at Shirdi. He is indeed one of those rare souls who ever bask in the constant spiritual proximity of Baba. He is the author of the famous book 'Sai the Superman'. An outline of his spiritual life and his experiences with Baba were summarized by him in his article entitled "The teachings of Shri Sainath" in the Souvenir published on the 50th Anniversary of Shri Sai Baba's *Mahasamadhi*. I quote it in toto from it for the benefit of the readers:

"On the Datta Jayanti day of 1940 A.D., my father took me to Malad to pay respects to one Balkrishna Maharaj, a disciple of Sri Akkalkot Maharaj. My father had taken with him two books, *Eknath Bhagawat* and *Life of Shri Akkalkot Maharaj* for the holy touch and blessings of

Balkrishnaji; the said Maharaj, instead of returning the book to my father as desired, handed over the books to me, asking me to read the same. My knowledge of Marathi was limited; so I could not understand *Eknath Bhagawat* but I read the Swamiji's life without any difficulty. I then expressed my desire to see such a saint if such a rarity could be found. Some months after this my father heard of such a saint, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi and went to Shirdi.

Till I attained the age of 18, I recognized the necessity of performing *sandhya*, *panchayatan puja* for me; but thereafter, I substituted in their place, reading of prayers and spiritual books. Thus I read *Life of Shri Ramkrishna Paramhamsa, In Tune with the Infinite*, *Out from the Heart*, Banyan's *Pilgrims' Progress*, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* and other books. About this time my professor of Philosophy introduced us to… Kant's reality. He pointed out that it was beyond Time, Space and Causation… I asked myself, if as Kant propounded, the reality was formless, attributeless, how could it have assumed a human form for the purpose of saving its devotees and destroying its enemies as Shri Rama and Krishna have done? Are these *puranas* and other books, about the two incarnations mere legends? Professors and comrades and clever students could not satisfy me. My father therefore advised me to go to Shri Sai Baba for solving my difficulty. Soon after my final L.L.B. examinations on 10.12.1911, I left for Shirdi, reaching Kopargaon at the early dawn.

After ablutions in the Godavari (at Kopargaon), we started again and soon Shirdi was sighted. Shri Baba was seen coming with a leper, a water pot in hand. Our *tonga* stopped and we got down for *darshan*. As I prostrated myself before Baba, He said, "God does exist; why do you say He does not exist?" Then he asked me to move aside. This one sentence of his, on my first sight, inspired me with faith in him and I determined from that moment, "Come what may, I should, with Baba's help, see Him face to face, talk to Him and consecrate my life to Him." Shri Balabhau Chandorkar, brother to the well –known devotee of Baba, took me, to Baba for *puja*. I prostrated before Him, garlanded Him and offered *prasad* and some *dakshina*. Baba's upadesh was only one worded, "*daksha*"("Be Careful").

On my waking from my noon nap, my memory went back to 1898 when I was studying Gujarati V standard at Kaira (in Gujarat) and when a *fakir* usually met me and cracked jokes at me, I felt that Baba's face was exactly like his. So Baba was an old acquaintance of mine. I felt Shri Baba confirmed this impression when Shri Dikshit tried to introduce me to Baba. He stopped him from doing so by saying, 'Don't try to introduce him to me. I know him since he was a mouse-like infant.' On my telling my mother (of it) she said, "Baba is right. A *fakir* had appeared and saved you by his holy ashes from a certain death when you were an infant.'

After about a week I obtained Baba's leave to return home. Baba gave me a handful of *udi*, and I started, but Baba had so contrived things that on my reaching the Godavari, the bullocks of my cart ran back to Shirdi, and I was again there. Construing this as Baba's wish that I should stay at Shirdi for some more days, I did so.

In July, 1912, I went to Shirdi for the *Guru Purnima* on the advice of Shri Dikshit. There, one night, Baba, appeared in my dream and said, 'I love you very much' and as if to confirm what he had stated in the dream, when I went to the *chavadi* for *kakad arti*, He gave me a smiling look.

Returning home and continuing the same daily routine of *puja*, (after) reading four chapters of Shri Das Ganu, one night Shri Baba appeared in my dream and said, "Go on chanting 'horse, horse". I wrote to Shri Dikshit at Shirdi about this and informed him of my interpretation of the same. At the same time I requested him to inform Baba of my interpretation and ask Him if it was correct. On knowing that Baba meant by 'horse' the same *mantra*, I started chanting it and lo! Within a few days Baba visually appeared to me everywhere in all beings, living and non-living.

I then started keeping term as an articled clerk to Jehangir Gulabhai& Bilimoria for a Solicitor's test. Thirteen months after, with the Master's permission I went to Shirdi but on the expiry of my vacation leave, Baba declined to permit me to return. I had to stay there for eleven months to get rid of T.B. symptoms which I had grown. On return, the solicitors insisted on putting in terms afresh. On petitioning to the High Court, the Chief Justice was pleased to order that only the residue of the term should be filled in by me.

During this period Shri Baba sent me to Radhakrishna Aayee. I could see that through her deep, intense love and complete dedication of body and mind to Baba's service, she had acquired several *siddhis*, yogic powers, so many that anyone could be inclined to believe from his experience that all her utterances were Baba's. She was very fond of Tukaram's *Abhang'* and *'Gita Govind'*. She showed me the easy posture for and the way of *dhyana* (meditation). She also drew my attention to the learned commentary of Eknath Maharaj on *'Bhagwat'* (11.36) and rightly stated that it contained the complete summary of the whole of his book. She never failed to recommended me to Baba for His grace. She detested publicity.

As to my spiritual progress during this period, I started reading the *Jnaneshwari*. I was able to complete a reading through His grace. Then He asked me to read the same over and over again. I went through the whole of the *Eknath 'Bhagawat'*. On reading the *Vasishtha Gita*, I felt inclined to start *pranayama*…but every time I started, Baba sent for me disallowing me to continue the same. I therefore dropped this altogether. On the morning of the *Guru Purnima*, when he was all alone I went to Him. He quoted Eknath "Not an iota of space is devoid of Me", and immediately thereafter asked me to take *udi* and go away. The same day after *arti*, Shri Aayee called me and said, "Here is the *prasad* received from Baba for you" and so saying she took a mango, cut it into pieces and with them she gave me a few *bajri* bread pieces soaked in milk and asked me to do justice to the same. When I had finished doing so, she took up my cup and washing the same herself drank that wash.

It was during this period that I had served Baba as His errandboy for fetching *dakshina* from devotees he would name: He also was pleased to ask me to fetch from Shri Jog's house His noon *bhiksha* and milk from another devotee for several days.

When I visited Shirdi in 1916, on the first night, I was at Radhakrisha Aayees's for supper; while at it, she gave me a few handfuls of rice, pulse, bread, vegetables, each time numbering the elements of which each was composed. She thus counted 45 to 50 such elements and said; "You must have such a thorough knowledge of them and not mere book knowledge." My loss of appetite disappeared from that very night and I also regained my sleep by a mere touch of her right hand.

Though I asked Baba several times if I should continue my studies for a solicitor's test, He always said "Yes". He was not for my renunciation. So, continuing my studies I passed the solicitor's test and practiced as such for sometime. My health, however, forced me to leave Bombay and take a quieter line. However, when all my near and dear relatives passed away leaving me alone with my wife and daughter, Baba Himself inspired my wife to ask me to fulfill my long-standing desire to renounce. Baba immediately arranged for the performance of the necessary ceremony at Dakore, of the donning *Gerua* (ochre) clothes. I felt that till Baba Himself gave me *Mahavakyopadesh* my renunciation was incomplete. So, six months later in January
1954, while I was at Talod, staying all alone in Shnakar's temple, He arranged for supernatural *Garba* dance and immediately thereafter He opened my *Upanishad* and asked me to read where He had opened it. On reading it, I was convinced that the *Mahavakyopadesh* I wanted was there. He also named my *guru* and *Param guru* indicating thereby He was my *Paratpar guru*. Since then I have been feeling that Baba is always with me, ever ready to guide. He is directing me to take up proper activities avoiding the improper ones. *Om Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!*"

How closely Baba watches over the comfort and convenience of Shri Sharananandaji can be seen from a miracle that is narrated by Sri D. Manganlal Pourohit of Ahmednagar. In 1963, Sri Manganlal started on a pilgrimage to holy Kedarnath along with Sri SaiSharananandaji and Smt.Gouribahen.

The party was to proceed from Mathura to Hardwar by bus and it was necessary to reserve their seats in the bus three days in advance. If they could not reach Hardwar by 26th of June, 1963 they would have to cancel all their subsequent programmes. But they had no hope of securing
seats in the bus just a few hours before departure time. Yet, as a last effort Sri Manganlal went to the bus stand at 8 p.m., and the bus had arrived. Sri Manganlal asked the conductor for tickets to Hardwar for the morning bus.

To the utter surprise of Sri Manganlal, the conductor spoke to him as familiarly as an old acquaintance and said,"Are there a Swamiji and an old lady traveling with you?" and then issued him three tickets for Hardwar. He said, "At Aligarh, an old *sadhu* gave me these tickets and told me to deliver them to you; he said that you would be meeting me at this bus-stand at 8 p.m. i.e., now."

Who could that old *sadhu* be? Shri Sai Sharananandaji was travelling. It could only be Sai Baba who assisted the party. This amply proves what Shri Sharananandaji said to me when we met him at Shirdi in 1976, "Sai Baba is always with me. I feel his presence and I even hear his words."

During his very dynamic life of intense prayer and devotion, thousands of suffering people were afforded solace and succour by Swami Sai Sarannanadaji. The saga of his spiritual ministration came to a peaceful end in 1982.

Sri B.V.Narasimhaswami

If today the glory of Sai Baba has spread all over India, the sole agent of it is Baba himself. Still, the man chosen for the work is Sri B.V. Narasimhaswami.

Narasimha Iyer (born in 1874) was a famous lawyer in Salem. Of exceptional concern for human values, he realized how many poor families are reduced to misery through litigation. So he preferred to settle their disputes amicably and never accepted a suit which was not morally right. His integrity and leadership won him high positions of esteem and power. He devoted all his energies for the Indian freedom struggle that was led by Gandhiji. Yet he was assiduous in religious life, both personal and public.

In the year 1921, the sudden death of two his children by drowning, was a turning point in his life. Any other man would have turned a disillusioned athiest, under the impact. He renounced all worldly activity and set on his quest for a *sadguru*. He had his formal initiation from the Shankaracharya of Sringeri and took the vow of *vanaprastha* (retirement). He lived for some time in a cave in the presence of Bhagwan Ramana Maharshi when he composed his work *Self Realization*, the standard biography of the Maharshi.

Realizing that his heart was inclined more towards the path of devotion, he left for Pandharpur in 1932, with the blessings of the Maharshi. Worship of Lord Vithal and *bhajan* did not quench his yearning. He visited Sri Narayana Maharaj of Khedgaonbet, cryptically introduced himself as a dealer in precious stones, in search of the very best. The saint reflected a little and directed him westwards. Swamiji first lived with Sri Meher Baba for some time and then with Sri Upasani Baba. Then he heard of Sai Baba and reached Shidi in 1936. Even at the very sight of the Baba's *samadhi* (tomb), he realized that he had contacted his *Sadguru par excellence*. He realized the truth of the words of Swami Ramadas, "A *jivan mukta's* body is full of divine light, power and joy. Even after he sheds it, his power remains in every particle of the dust. They give out spiritual radiance." He records, "I have surrendered my all to that living *Chaitanya* (Spirit)." Henceforth, it was Sai Spirit that lived in him and not he. Every breath, thought and act of his bore the fragrance of his devotion to the *guru* and perfumed our whole land. His tireless spirit sought out the devotees who lived with Baba, gathered their experiences and composed articles and books in different languages. In 1939, he established the All India Sai Samaj in Madras. He toured the length and breadth of the country establishing devotional groups everywhere.

On one of his later visits to Shirdi, when he was in deep meditation near Baba's *samadhi*, a stranger gave him Rs.11,455/- for Baba's work and disappeared in the crowd. The work grew and a fine Sai Mandir, a school, a free dispensary, the journel *Sai Sudha*, the vast Sai literature in diverse langages and the printing press are to be his material body to continue his work even today.

Innumerable were the miraculous cures Sri Narasimhaswami had effected and personal problems of devotees were solved through mere blessing. Let us note a few cases. Two devotees wished to see him the next morning. That night they saw a *sadhu* in red robes going past their place and followed him, but he mysteriously disappeared. Next morning, the Swamiji showed them a picture of Baba in red garments. The *sadhu* they had seen was, indeed, Sai Baba! Similarly, the

famous Sai devotee of Andhra, late Sri B.V.Hanumantha Rao had a dream in which Baba told him to be his 'official biographer'. The next day, when he met Sri Narsimhaswami, the latter requested him to translate all his Sai literature into Telugu which he did.

In spite of being such a perfect vehicle of Baba's grace Swamiji never claimed to be anything more than a humble devotee. He never said, "I bless you!" but always said, "Baba bless you!" The magnificent saga of his earthly existence came to a peaceful end on October 19,1956. Yet his spirit is active.

"Once I had some problem in the Office which made me feel the absence of the Swamiji," writes his devotee, "Next morning, my wife told me that Swamiji appeared in her dream and said, 'Why does O.V.K. think I am not here? I am here. He will get through the event successfully."

Sri Radhakrisha Swamiji

The mantle of Sai Baba's apostolic work next fell on late Sri Radhakrishna Swamiji from the hands of his *guru,* Sri B.V. Narasimhaswami. The second apostle was, even from his boyhood, very deeply religious. Nurtured in close contact with such spiritual stalwarts as H.H.Shankaracharya of Kanchi, he was initiated by Sri Narayan Maharaj of Khedgaonbet with the *Dutta Mantra* in 1927. He poured over the life histories of great saints and even contacted some, like Bhagawan Ramana and Seshadri Swamy. He met Narasimha Swami in 1942 but wondered how the latter despite living with a sage like Bhagawan Ramana could be drawn to Sai Baba whom he had never seen but finally surrendered to him and took as his life's motive the propagation of Sai Baba's teaching. Finally he founded the Sai spiritual center at Bangalore and ably attended to the maintenance of the All India Sai Samaj in Madras. Many were those drawn to Baba through his magnetic personality and profuse miraculous experiences. For instance,
when he was busy in Pune, some people had seen him at Shirdi too. Many were those that were released of their suffering and ailments with his blessing. Yet like his *guru,* he never claimed to be anything more than a humble, devotee of Baba and a disciple of Sri Narasimha Swami.

After leading such a life of spiritual fullness, Sri Radhakrishan Swamiji attained *Mahasamadhi* on January 14,1980. The Sai spiritual center in Bangalore, with its newly installed statue of their immortal apostle is a standing memento to his invaluable services to mankind, a beacon light for many to follow.

Swami Kesavayyaji

Sri Kesavayya realized the spiritual excellence of Sai Baba in a short time, through his own experience, without studying any books. The grace of Sri Sai Baba having entered the heart of Sri Kesavayya, has been sanctifying the lives of thousands of people, affording material and spiritual comfort to them. Sri Sai Baba's choice of an ordinary Government Employee as the fit recipient of his grace is not without sufficient reasons. In fact, the whole life of Sri Kesavayya amply proves that he deserved it.

Sri Kesavayya was born on 1st of July, 1899 as the second of four children of a Vaishnavaite couple, Sri Balaiah and Smt. Sanjeevamma who were devoted to Sri Rama. Young Kesavayya

readily imbibed all that he heard, of the daily reading of the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Ramayana*. The family lived at Pamidi on the banks of the sacred river Pennar. The place was sanctified by the austerities of several great saints in the long past and by the existence of several ancient temples that were established by them.

The day on which young Kesavayya was born happened to be a new-moon day. The traditional belief of the people was that such a one would become either a thief or a great *yogi*. Soothsayers and *sadhus* assured the agitated parents that their son was sure to blossom into a great saint. The passage of years held forth enough promise grounds for the parents. Even at an early age he used to spend hours together in rapt meditation in the temples. Such was the subterranean spring, so to stay, of young Kesavayya's otherwise normal life.

Among his teachers at the middle school was one Mr. Lekklar who was strangely drawn to the boy. Young Kesavayya spent much of his time learning about Jesus Christ from his revered teacher. No wonder that at the tender age Kesavayya was blessed with as divine vision of Jesus the Christ. So too, there was a Moslem who was much attracted by young Kesavayya. He used to tell the boy about prophet Mohammad and his teachings. Shortly after, the boy had the vision of Prophet Mohammad too. Young Kesavayya was not much interested either in playing with other lads, gossip or even in running after sweets and other daintees. He was made of a different metal.

The boy was so advanced in his devotions that the gift of prophecy was already manifesting itself in him. Lekklar is said to have testified that the young boy prophesied the end of the British rule in India and the dawn of Indian Independence. At a time when the name of Congress was not known to the common-folk he prophecied that the Congress Party would rule India for a long time.

After completing his high school studies at Ananthapur, Kesavayya joined as a clerk in the District Registar's Office at Anantapur in 1923, and within a year, he was married to a girl named Govindamma. In 1933 Sri Kesavayya was confirmed in the post of Sub-Regisitrar. As an official he had won the respect of everyone by his honesty and competence. He never uttered a lie nor did he ever accept bribes. He was known for his fearlessness. Yet he was kind and sympathetic in his duties towards the poor.

In 1918, on the holy day of Vijayadasami Sri Sai Baba shed his physical body. About the same time Sri Kesavayya and his mother Sanjeevamma were both laid up with illness. And on that day his mother passed away. Strangely enough there spread a rumour in the village that Sri Kesavayya had passed away. From that day onwards Sri Kesavayy's health rapidly improved.

However, on his part *sadhana* (or spiritual discipline) was not conscious. He himself tells us, he felt no spiritual urge in him before the 1st of July 1939. He was as westernized in his dress, habits and ideas as any other young man of his age. He even questioned how God could be dwelling in stone idols and how offering of coconuts to them could be of any use. Was it not better, he asked, to use that money to help the poor instead?

The Call of God comes in the most unexpected of ways. In 1939, his elder daughter was seriously ill. Elders advised him to go on a pilgrimage. Accordingly, he started on his pilgrimage

in the South from holy Rameswaram. His visit to the temple of Ramalingeswara proved flat in terms of spiritual experience though aesthetically he was much attracted by the sculpture and the architecture of the temple. Later he visited Srirangam, Madurai and Kanchi with no better result. Finally he visited the temple of Lord Subrahmanya at Palani which proved to be his *Bodhi* tree.

After worshipping the Lord with *vibhuti* (or sacred ash) Sri Kesvayya closed his eyes and bowed to the deity with great devotion. As he opened his eyes, in the place of the idol he saw a glorious, unearthly, light which thrilled his whole being and seemed to draw him most powerfully to itself. At the height of his ecstasy he lost all consciousness for a time. When he regained his normal consciousness for a time he felt extremely weak. When he later revisited Rameswaram, the sight of the idol of Lord Ramalingeswara moved him to ecstasy. He thus realized that the idols in temples are not mere stones but are the manifestations of the Lord Himself. The two mystic experiences opened up the springs of mystic power that lay dormant in him. Henceforth, whenever he looked at any one he could clearly 'see' everything about the person's past, present and future. And he could hardly restrain himself from speaking out what he saw. If he foresaw any impending misfortunes in store for the other person, he could even avert them.

By May 1939 Sri Kesavayya concluded his pilgrimage and returned to Dharamavaram. In about a month's time Sri Sai Baba graced Kesavayya with his *darshan* (or vision).

Sri Kesavayya first heard of Sri Sai Baba from the famous lawyer at Anantapur, Sri M.Malli Reddy. The latter often visited Dharmavarm where Sri Kesavayya was working and the two used to meet often.

Sri Kesavayya's intolerance of any trace of corruption in his office exposed him to the hostility of his fellow-employees; and when he met Sri M. Malli Reddy, he often gave vent to his vexations. Though the lawyer from Anantapur was a devotee of Sri Sai Baba for long and though he was acquainted with Sri Kesavayya since 1930, it never occurred to him to mention the great saint's name or glory to his friend. Everything has its own ripe moment.

In 1939, one day Sri Kesavyya accompanied Sri Malli Reddy to the railway station to see him off and was pouring out his countless vexations till almost the train started. The latter who, till then remained a helpless listener suddenly had a flash of an idea and said, "Mr.Kesavayya, your are suffering too much; why not resort to the worship of Sri Sai Baba?" The train moved leaving no time for him to say anything more. In those days Sri Sai Baba's greatness was not so well known and Sri Kesavayya himself had never heard of him earlier.

But ever since he heard the name of Baba he went on thinking who that Baba was. He and his wife decided to worship Baba's picture. That night Sai Baba appeared in his dream for a few minutes. The next day when he was still thinking of writing for a picture of Baba, he received a copy of it from the Sai Samsthana at Shirdi! And after two days he received a packet of *udi* too. How could the Samsthan know about Sri Kesavayya and his address? How could they send him the picture and *udi?* Undoubtedly it was one of Baba's miracles. It was too short a time for Sri Malli Reddy to have written to the Samsthan on his behalf.

The next day, when he was putting on his usual western dress Kesavayya heard a mysterious voice, "Why all this show for you?" This effected a strange transformation in him and he at once changed over to the use of the *dhoti*. All his colleagues wondered at the transformation of Sri Kesavayya.

About this time he again met Sri Malli Reddy who was pleasantly surprised to hear about his dream experience. He said, "You are blessed indeed! Not every one can have the *darshan* of Baba even in a dream. Undoubtedly you must have been his devotee in your previous life." Henceforth Sri Kesavayya started worshipping Baba. Within a short time all his troubles vanished like mist in sunlight.

As days passed, devotees started flocking to Sri Kesavayya for succour, and Baba's grace reached them through him. Nearly seven years after his miraculous experience, Sri Kesavayya began sharing the illness of his devotees in curing them. In 1948 he had an attack of tuberculosis. On 10th of June he came to Madras for treatment and stayed there for good. Inspite of his illness he went on curing the sick with the *udi* of Sai Baba. Doctors examined him and found that his left lung was completely useless and there were no indications of any possible cure. Sri Kesavayya himself gave up hope of his recovery at one stage and made all arrangements for the subsistence of his family after his impending demise. Having centered his mind firmly on Baba he lay on his bed calmly, looking at the *guru's* picture.

On 29th of April 1949, at about 11.30, Sri Kesavayya clearly saw the attendants of Death entering his room. Unpertrubed, he said to them mentally, "You may take me away after securing the permission of Sai Baba!" At once Baba appeared before him and drove them out. The very next moment loud wailing was heard from the neighbouring house. An ailing person in that house had passed away! Sri Kesavayya's condition rapidly improved. Dr. Veera Reddy who lovingly attended on Sri Kesavayya had remarkable experience regarding the latter's powers of prophecy and soon became one of his intimate devotees.

Many were the mystic visions of Baba with which Sri Kesavayya was blessed. In one of these, Sai Baba gave him holy water and in another, Baba blessed him by keeping his hands on Sri Kesavayya's head. Baba often indicated coming dangers to him and helped him in tiding the crises.

There were other remarkable experiences too. When he visited Shirdi in 1943 he had a wish to go to Pandharpur. He took lots with the help of chits to know Baba's direction in the matter. As the response was in the affirmative he proceeded on his journey. A stranger met him at Dhond and accompanied him to Pandharpur and took him to a choultry in a *tonga*. He even paid for the conveyance! After making all the necessary arrangements, he said to Sri Kesavayya, "Whenever you think of me I shall come to you." And he went along. Who could he be?

Today as a monument of Baba's grace a magnificent Sai Temple has taken shape at Shenoynagar in Madras. Sri Kesavayya inaugurated The Sai Mandir at Vidya nagar on March 12, 1981 and later attained *mahasamadhi* on 7th August, 1981.

There are many more of the offshoots of Baba which bear testimony to the fact that Baba is a living spiritual force, ready to alchemize every heart that opens itself to him. The more fortunate of these guard against the snares of craving for fame and wealth but there are some who succumb to such. Baba had already sounded the caution in his parable of the mango-tree in blossom. Many fall off and very few reach the state of fruition.

The Tomb that Speaks and Moves

Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi said that contact with one's *sadguru* continues even after his physical death. The phenomenal spread of devotion to Sai Baba in this country today is chiefly the work of his tomb which 'moves' and 'speaks' with his devotees.

Mr. F.M. Bhangara is a devout Parsi who imbibed, high regard for saints. But his wife was orthodox and had no such faith. In 1956 he kept a calendar with Sai Baba's picture on it in their bed room, but he neither knew nor paid any respect to the saint. One day, at 6 a.m. he was impelled to bow to Baba and was surprised at his own act for he knew nothing of Baba. He did not mention it to his wife for fear of raising an argument about it.

Next morning he noticed that the calendar was garlanded and asked his wife about it. She said that when she was cleaning the pictures in the house, she heard a mysterious voice from the picture, "Child, garland me regularly; it will do you good" twice and she obeyed it. A friend heard of their experience and suggested to keep the picture in their shrine on a Thursday. He did so and his wife used to garland it everyday.

One day the mysterious voice asked her what she wanted. She sought the welfare of her husband and the birth of a son. Within a week, of his own accord, the superior officer recommended a rise in Mr.Bhangara's salary. In June 1957 they were blessed with a son.

Solution to all their problems used to flash in their minds when they prayed to Baba and even the most trivial wishes were fulfilled. Many got their problems resolved through Mr. Bhangara. Yet he sometimes wondered whether the messages were his own fancies.

One day Mr. Bhangara had to go on an official camp. His wife insisted that he should return by evening. When he bowed to Baba the voice said, "Son, you can't return today." To test whether it was a message from Baba, he started at 7.30 a.m. when the car had to stop at a level-crossing, a gentleman got down from a state transport bus and got into Bhangara's car saying that he was in a hurry to reach his destination sooner. While travelling on a ghat road, the car took a turn and the breaks failed completely. The car was racing down the slope with increasing speed. There was a deep valley on one side and a hill on the other. The driver told them not to get panicky and that he would try to dash the car against the hill in the safest possible manner. But whenever he tried to do so some vehicle or the other came up that side and they narrowly missed a collision. Bhangara recollected Baba's message and felt that it signified his imminent death. Being a palmist, Bhangara remembered that his hand indicated sudden death at that time. He desperately

prayed, “Baba, I know that I have to die some day. Yet at least for the sake of my family you have to save my life this time. I shall not henceforth doubt your messages.”

One of the tires of the car hit a stone on the road and stopped. The driver changed the tire and they reached their destination in seven hours. There was no chance for Bhangara to return home that evening!

Mr. Chitnis was at first fascinated by a beautiful picture of Baba and read several books on him. He visited Shirdi in 1952 and felt that he had returned to his own place. The very first sight of Baba’s *samadhi* had impressed him for good.

In 1957, his sister at Bombay was seriously ill and the family wished to start by plane. His parents could secure a seat by the next plane but his name was kept in the waiting list. Mr.Chitnis sat there silently praying to Baba that by the time they reach Bombay his sister should recover her health. He suddenly found an old *fakir* standing by. The latter looked sad and gestured accordingly. The next moment, the *fakir* was not to be seen! It suddenly occurred to him that the *fakir* was Sai Baba himself. He was surprised to learn that none else saw the *fakir*. At last when Mr. Chitnis reached Bombay his sister was no more.

In 1965 Mr.Chitnis suffered from a severe pain in the stomach and could not take even a spoonful of water. The doctor decided to try surgery on the next Thursday. Chitnis prayed that he should be spared the ordeal. That night in his dream four terrible persons were pulling him out of the bed. Sai Baba felled some of them and saved Chitnis. By morning Sri Chitnis was alright to the surprise of the doctor.

On a certain Thursday in 1966 he completed a reading of the life of Baba. Mr.Chitnis was to go to Agra by car. He prayed to Baba for his *darshan*. Next morning, after covering about sixty miles the car stopped at a place for no apparent reason. A *fakir* who resembled Sai Baba was found standing by. The *fakir* blessed them and received *dakshina* and disappeared. Mr.Chitnis was surprised to know later that only his youngest son, he and the driver saw the *fakir* and others didn’t see anyone.

Sri P.V.Satyanarayana Sastri records, in an article, the strange transformation of a famous atheist of Andhra into an ardent devotee of Baba. Late Sri Gopichand, a famous writer and a prominent atheist, was working as an employee of the Government at Kurnool. His wife was in the hospital, suffering from labour pains for three days and her condition was critical. On the third day, as he walked past the Sai Mandir towards hospital, he thought : “Baba, if you could bless my wife with a safe delivery, I shall believe that your power is divine.”

At the hospital his wife delivered a male child. She told him that an old *fakir* in a vision, sat on her cot and said, “Don’t fear. I shall save you.” He then put a little *vibhuti* on her forehead, put a little of it in water and gave her to drink. She at once delivered. And the time of her vision coincided precisely with the time of his silent prayer to Baba! Gopichand named his son as Sai Baba, causing quite a stir among his atheist friends.

Though Mr. Veerendra Pandya had no faith in Baba, he visited Shirdi with his brother. Later he lived at Kalyan near Bombay and his parents lived in Bihar. Once when his family had to face many difficulties, he took out the picture of Baba which was lying in his trunk, kept it in the shrine and prayed fervently that he should find a solution to his problem by evening. At once peace descended on him and by evening he hit upon a solution to his problem. Strangely, he learned from a letter that the same solution occurred to his mother too, precisely at the same hour. He decided to dedicate all his life, henceforth to the service of Baba, giving up all worldly activity but his mother insisted that he should marry. Again he prayed for a written solution to the problem. Next day, quite casually, his eyes fell on a book entitled, *Sri Sai Baba Upasana*. He opened it at random and the chapter *Bhavasudha* came up. The message contained therein was that a householder's life is preferable. Yet he doubted whether it was mere coincidence.

At that time he was residing at Vitarna, a forest area infested by robbers disguised as *sadhus*. So he instructed his watchman not to permit even *'sadhus'* to enter his gate. With these facts in mind, he one day prayed , "Baba, in order that my faith in you could get strengthened, tomorrow a Thursday which is sacred to you, at lunch time a *sadhu* should come, bless me by keeping his right hand on my head and make passes with the same all over my body. If this is granted, I vow to visit Shirdi".

Next day at lunch time no *sadhu* turned up. Just as Pandya was about to partake of the first morsel, a *sadhu* called for food. When Pandya offered him food, the former received the same and put his right hand on Pandys's head by way of blessing and left. Pandya recognized that only a part of his wish was fulfilled and that he did not receive the *sadhu* in a proper manner. While he was thinking the *sadhu* returned. Pandya offered him Rs.2/- as *dakshina*. The *fakir* passed his hand all over pandya's body, smiled sportively and went away. Next Thursday Pandya fulfilled his vow.

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Miss. Marva L. Hemphill wrote of her striking experience with Baba in a short letter to the author of this present book :

Atlanta Ga (U.S.A.)

January 18,1970.

Dear Brother in God,

Baba came on 1-12-70! He has been teaching me very rapidly about Christ ever since…it is so wonderful. From now on he is 'Baba Christ' as Jesus is Jesus Christ.

Yours,
In the name of Baba Christ,
Marva.

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In 1955, Sri Jayaram Raje was a lawyer at Thana. Once he finished a devotional reading of the *Life of Sai Baba*. On the next day, Thursday, he offered sweet meats to Baba's picture. Precisely at lunch time a *fakir* came to him for food. He was dressed like a Moslem. Raje being an orthodox Brahmin offered him food in a leaf plate and requested him to eat it elsewhere. The *fakir* insisted that he would eat it there itself. Raje fed him accordingly, considering him as Baba himself.

After lunch the *fakir* demanded *dakshina*. Raje said that if a client paid him Rs.50/- he would have given him his due. The *fakir* said that the client would pay him the dues at 3-15 p.m. that day and that he himself would turn up at 5 p.m. to receive the *dakshina*. The client who lived far away did turn up at 3-15 p.m. and cleared the dues. The *fakir* too came up at 5p.m.and received Rs.10/- In return the latter offered Raje a little *vibhuti* which, by the time it fell into his hand, got mysteriously transformed into a rose. Raje looked up in surprise and the *fakir* was not to be seen anywhere!

Sivashankar Dixit a devotee of Lord Dattatreya, despaired when he knew that he was suffering from tuberculosis. One day he had a dream, he saw a picture of a Moslem saint and bowed to it; at the same moment, a moslem *fakir* came and applied *vibhuti* on his forehead and assured him that he would soon be well.

When his condition improved without any treatment, Dixit realized that it was a visitation. One of his friends suggested that the *fakir* might be Sai Baba himself. Four days after, a group of children who played there, left a small picture of Baba's *samadhi* in his house. Dixit found that the *fakir* of his dream precisely resembled the photograph of Sai Baba on the *samadhi*, found in that picture. Later he visited Shirdi and saw that there was the marble statue on Baba's *samadhi* and not a photograph of Sai Baba. On enquiry he was told that till 1956 a photograph of Sai Baba was indeed kept on Baba's *samadhi* and that the statue was installed only in that year. The picture of the Moslem *fakir* which he saw in his dream was indeed the photograph of Baba which was earlier kept on the *samadhi!* Henceforth Dixit worshipped Sai Baba as Lord Dattatreya.

Mr.K.D.Matrey once visited Shirdi. The *samadhi mandir* was under repair, his child who was two and a half years old stood on the first floor, looking at children playing on the road below. Suddenly she leaned forward, slipped and fell down from the terrace. Several devotees rushed to her but the child stood up smiling and said, "As I fell down, the old man in that picture leaped up, held me in his hands and kept me down"!

An advocate from Boribandar, once started for Shirdi with Rs.100/- in his pocket. Unfortunately (or fortunately?) his pocket was picked and he had lost the money and his railway ticket. Later the ticket examiner came up and did not relent even after hearing about the theft. Just then an old gentleman gave the lawyer a ticket and said that his man did not join him as promised. He introduced himself as a devotee of Sai Baba and bore all the expenses of the advocate. At Shirdi the old man presented him with a copy of a book on Sai Baba and also gave him his address in Bombay. Later on, opening the book the advocate found Rs.100/- in it. When he returned home he found his purse before Baba's picture in his family shrine! He soon went to Bombay but the old man's address could not be traced. The advocate kept the money he found in the book in his shrine for worship. Thereafter his financial condition improved considerably.

In 1930 Dr. Rustomji was laid up with pneumonia and was admitted in the Parsi general hospital in Bombay. The doctors gave up hope and he was in coma. A *fakir* appeared to him in a vision and said, "Let your health recover first; later you will come to know me!" He then went round Rustomji's cot and disappeared. Soon after, the doctors were surprised to find that his condition was quite normal. Ever since, Rustomji yearned to see the *fakir*. After six months a passenger who sat next to him in the bus was reading a book on Sai Baba. Rustomji saw Baba's picture in it and realized that he was the *fakir* that had saved him and started reading about Sai. Shortly he was appointed as a doctor in the Sai *Samsthan* dispensary at Shirdi in 1949.

Once his wife suffered from severe pain in her eyes. Doctors examined her and declared that even doctors abroad will not be able to help her. At last Sri Rustomji brought her to Shirdi and every day he used to take her round Baba's *samadhi*. She vowed to offer an embroidered cloth to Baba's *palanquin* if she was cured. In the course of an year she was well and she fulfilled her vow.

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A gentleman at Udapur was suffering from stomach ulcer. His wife Surajbai was anxious about him at Kamgaon. One night she had a terrible dream; she saw her husband's body being carried to the cremation ground, and she was telling her brother that she preferred death to widowhood. A strange *fakir* with a radiant face said to her "Why do you weep?" "Your husband will come to life again". At once here husband sat up and the dream ended.

Later she came to know that on the same day her husband's condition grew hopeless and that he soon recovered quite mysteriously. She later saw the picture of Baba and recognized him as the *fakir* who came in her dream and started worshipping it ignoring the criticism and objections of her co-religionists. After sometime she visited Shirdi and recognized the place in which the *fakir* stood in her dream vision was indeed *Dwarakamai*.

On her next visit to Shirdi she had two dreams : One: Several persons of Jain religion were going round Sai Baba, chanting, "Sainath *Boleja*". Two: Several Jain Sadhus were assembled in a large hall and Baba was seated at the centre. She asked him for instruction about a certain matter. Baba then told her to seek it from a saint named Santnath Bhagwan, seated in the assembly. With this she woke up. She understood thereby that Baba had instructed her to stick to the tenets of her own religion, that her devotion to Baba does not run counter to adherence to one's native faith.

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Arthur Osborne, in his book *Incredible Sai Baba*, writes that in 1960, one Miss.Dutton, his neighbour aged 30 had lived in a nunnery for sometime and decided to leave it. One day, she sat in her cell brooding over the uncertainties of her future. A Moslem *fakir* approached her cell and said, "Don't worry. When you leave the nunnery, everything would go well with you". When he demanded *dakshina*, she said, that she had no money "There are Rs.35/- in the box in your cupboard", he said. When she looked up, she did find the money. But the *fakir* had vanished! She wondered how a man and a Moslem *fakir* at that, had gained entry into the Christian nunnery. Since the moment he had appeared, peace filled her anxious heart. She left the nunnery and her

nephew looked after her well. Henceforth her faith had grown stronger. Arthur Osborne who listened to the whole account then showed her a picture of Sai Baba and she at once recognized him as the *fakir* who had graced her. A Christian ought to live a truly Christian life. The spirit manifests itself in a form like Baba's in the modern age to wean humans from the narrowness which is a by-product of religious diversity of modern society.

One day a *fakir* came to the house of Mr. Dandavate of Indore at noon and called his wife by name. When her husband responded, the *fakir* said that he came to see his 'daughter' Kamalabai. The later came out and invited him for breakfast. Kamalabai's husband left for the school. The *fakir* told her that he had not come for food and that he wanted her sari of nine yards length. She marvelled at his uncanny knowledge and went in to get it. But all the time she was wondering what she could say to her husband if he were to ask about it. At once the *fakir* told her in a raised voice from the drawing-room. "Do not worry. You shall soon get a new sari in its place by tomorrow"! She wondered still more that the *fakir* could respond to her unuttered thought. She was convinced that he could be none other than Sai Baba and she offered him the sari without
any hesitation. She again went inside to offer him a cup of milk but by the time she came out, he was nowhere to be found! Next day his word came true. For, a housewife of the neighbourhood visited her and presented her with a nine-yards sari. Besides, the fortunes of the family steadily improved thereafter.

In Mahim, Bombay there was a large poor family of six. The head of the family was a clerk. Once he committed a serious blunder in the accounts, and feared dismissal. One of his friends, a devotee of Sai Baba, heard of his anxiety and gave him *udi* and asked him to use it twice everyday and assured him that his difficulties would cease in a month or two. Shortly after, his mistake in accounts was discovered. He could not face the situation. So he went on leave for a month and came home. He was frightened by the prospect of dismissal and decided to commit suicide to end his sufferings. One day he kissed his child, wore an old shirt and went out. His wife knew of his distracted state of mind and knew that it was of no use preventing him from going out. So she called him back, gave him Sai Baba's *udi* and let him go. Then she sat before Baba's picture and went on praying fervently to him to save her husband's life.

Her husband who had left the house in the morning did not turn up even in the evening. He went to Borivelle in Bombay and jumped into a secluded tank. A fisherman rescued him and threatened to hand him over to the police if he did not return home. He gave a little money and left him at his house at 11 p.m. The next minute the fisherman disappeared! Baba is the fisher of men's souls too!

Manikshah never ate anything without first offering it to Baba. Yet he could not visit Shirdi for a long time. Once on his way to Nagpur he was sleeping in his reserved compartment. At about 1-30 p.m. he woke up at Manmad. A vague human form appeared and said "Do not proceed further!", and vanished. He looked out but found none. He got down from the train. He had his next train for Nagpur only late in the evening. The pilgrims proceeding to Shirdi suggested that he could join them and he did. By evening he returned to Manmad and was shocked to learn that the earlier train by which he came, later met with a major accident and that many were killed or wounded. Baba had mercifully saved him from the danger and fulfilled his wish to visit Shirdi.

After Baba's *mahasamadhi*, Shama kept a packet of *udi* received from him in his shrine. Once when he went to Bombay, one night Baba appeared in his dream and said, "Shyama, the packet of *udi* which I had given you is now lying in the dustbin by the side of your house. Go home at once and restore it." Shyama rushed home and looked for the packet in his shrine but it was not there! As the house was under repairs, all the articles in his house were removed and in the process, the packet was missing. Shyama searched for it outside and lo, it was in the dustbin. Thus Baba's appearance even in a dream, is significant.

Similarly, one Mr. Mehrothra, agent of a bank at Bareilly, was suspended from service. He then visited Shirdi, and prayed to Baba. One day the latter appeared in his dream, and gave him in writing "You shall be appointed as an agent; do not fear"! Shortly after, he was appointed as such at Deoria.

R.S. Mani Iyer of Kumbakonam had a daughter who was dumb by birth. Mani Iyer commenced the worship of Baba. Once Baba appeared in his dream and instructed him to make his little daughter worship his *samadhi* at Shirdi. Accordingly she did and immediately she uttered the name 'Sai Baba'. In a short while she started speaking quite well.

Similarly, a girl in Bombay was knocked down by a car and lost her power of speech. A devotee gave her *udi* which he had received from the hands of Baba. At once she regained her speech.

In 1956, a boy of sixteen was afflicted with polio of his legs. His mother took him to Shirdi and there she went round Baba's *samadhi* several times a day praying for her son's recovery. The boy was carried around the *samadhi* by a hired person. After a few days the boy felt it embarrassing and stayed back in their room and asked his mother to carry on her devotions. One day Baba appeared before him physically, lifted him by the hand and led him to the *samadhi mandir*. There Baba told him to stand leaning against pillar. Then his mother was convinced of the miracle when she saw him walk along with her!

A few years ago, after the birth anniversary of Sri Omkaraswami, at Totapalli, (East Godavari Dt. , A.P.) the devotees gathered in a small room and sang *bhajans* of Sai Baba. At once Baba's name was found inscribed mysteriously on all the fruits and flowers offered to Sai, including a coconut offered by the Swami and also on watches, rings and necklaces, put before Sai by devotees. On a ball of *vibhuti* appeared the letters *'Sai Mandu'* ('Sai medicine'). A devotee suffering from fever and an ailing cow were instantly cured with it. The devotees wished to raise a Sai mandir at the place. At once they found the words, "This is the presence of Sai!" mysteriously written on a white paper and on the walls of the shrine in the *ashram*. Sri Omakaraswami later announced in the *ashram* journal 'Santhi' that ever since, he has been
feeling the whole place charged with spiritual power and that he has been experiencing a sense of identity with Sai.

Sri Dileep Kumar Roy of Poona is a famous disciple of Sri Aurobindo and a great devotee of Lord Krishna. He has established the Hare Krishna Ashram in Poona and has been leading several seekers on the path of devotion. Several years ago a friend of him presented him with an idol of Sai Baba. Sri Dileep Kumar Roy had kept it along with several other idols in an open place in the *ashram* compound. That night Sai Baba appeared before him and said, "I am

shivering in the cold. Take me inside the *ashram* and keep me in a comfortable place." Soon Sri Roy kept the idol of Baba inside the *ashram* and later kept it in a small shrine. This happened some fifty years after Baba's *mahasamadhi*.

Sri Devaraj of Coimbatore was a Captain of a ship during the Second World War. Once his ship was attacked by the enemy but he was rescued miraculously by Sai Baba. News of this miracle spread in Coimbatore and many were drawn to Sai Baba. Among these was Sri Soundara Rajan. He commenced the worship and *bhajan* of Sai Baba in house and he soon constructed a *mandir* for the public.

One evening a large gathering of devotees was engaged in *bhajan*. A huge cobra approached them and crept over the foot of a little boy. The boy cried in panic but the devotees remained calm. The snake stood within a few feet of the gathering and was swaying its hood in tune with their *bhajan*. People wondered why it was not scared by the large gathering. It stayed in the same place from 5 p.m. to 9.p.m. i.e., till the devotees dispersed for that night.

Next morning the devotees were surprised to find it in the same place. This convinced them that Sai Baba himself appeared in that form and they decided to worship it with all ceremony. They fetched several baskets full of chrysanthemum flowers. They all gathered around the snake and threw the flowers on it while chanting the 108 divine names of Sai. Even though flowers were thrown on it in thousands the cobra remained there calm and peaceful.

One of the devotees then prayed to it saying, "If you are indeed Sai Baba, you please stay here till we fetch a photographer to take your picture for people may not believe when we tell them that we had the good fortune of worshipping you in this manner." It took nearly half an hour for the photographer to arrive and the cobra stayed there and was photographed. The picture taken on that occasion can be seen in the souvenir published by the Naga Sai Mandir at Coimbatore a few years ago. The Naga Sai Mandir which was built there at that spot is a memento of this *leela* of Baba.

Mankewala of Ahmedabad was laid up with dropsy and intestinal ulcer from 1948 to 1952. He felt it difficult even to drink water. His body weight had increased to 300 pounds and he used to spit blood on account of the ulcer. The doctors who examined him in 1952 had declared that he was sure to pass away in one or two day's time. In a mood of utter helplessness he started worshipping the picture of Baba that his friends had given him. At first he was not so happy to worship the 'moslem saint' which he thought Baba was. Yet Baba's form charmed his heart.

One day at 6 a.m., when he was lying awake in bed, Baba appeared before him and said, "I am not a *fakir*; I am the *avatar* of Lord Dattatreya. The same Lord is carrying on his divine mission assuming the different forms of Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, Dhunivala Dada of Khandwa, Sri Vishnudevananda Saraswathi of Narmada, Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and myself." Next morning his friend gave him two books on Sai Baba written in Gujarati.

A few days later doctors examined him and decided that he had only two more hours to live. As soon as they had left the room a mysterious light appeared in front of Mankewala. Behind it appeared Sai Baba! It was about one p.m. Baba said "Son, do not fear! I have taken away all

your sufferings". The wonder of it is that even the mother of Mankewala could see Baba. He then told them to send Mankewala's son to Shirdi and then walked out of the room.

Mankewala was worried whether his son could travel alone to Shirdi safely and, in case he dies, his son's presence was necessary to perform his obsequies. At last he decided to abide by Baba's words and so sent his son to Shirdi. At about 6 p.m., Baba again appeared to him and said, "Do not fear! I am with your son. You will receive a telegram that he had reached Shirdi safely by 12 noon tomorrow."

A few minutes later the doctors again examined the patient and thought that he was dying. They mocked at his accounts of Baba's assurance. Indeed, nothing happened to Mankewala and the next day they received a telegram from Shirdi regarding his son's safe arrival there. For 24 hours precisely from the moment of the receipt of the telegram Mankewala passed excess of urine and suffered a severe attack of diarrhoea. Soon his body weight came down to 75 pounds. His pulse and heart beat were normal. The doctors agreed that his recovery was indeed a miracle of Sai Baba. Within the next two months Mankewala regained his normal health. On 23rd of August 1954 Sai Baba again appeared before him. Waving his baton(*satka*) playfully, he said, "I am always in front of my devotees".

Sri Seshachalam Pillay was a retired Tahsildar who lived at Tummalagunta village near Tirupati (A.P.). On 1-11-1977 his wife Smt. Susilamma came to my house and recounted her experience of Sai Baba's grace.

In 1952 the family was staying at Narsingpur near Chandragiri Railway station. Even several years after marriage they had no children and all their relations were pressing Sri Pillay to marry a second time. One day her elder brother gave Smt.Susilamma a small picture of Baba and told her to worship it and said that Baba might bless her with an offspring. She started doing accordingly and in 1954 she was blessed with a son whom they named after Sai Baba.

When the child was eleven months old, it had fever and the mother suffered from severe diarrhoea. All medical aid proved futile and even after living on a diet of arrow-root powder for 21 days she had no relief. She was so weak that she could not go out of her room to answer nature's calls. On the 21st day at 4.30 a.m., she had an urge to pass stool, She got down from the cot, sat down just by for the purpose and, reclining her head against the cot, she prayed to Baba to help her. She at once saw Sai Baba entering the room pushing open the main door! He came and sat on the cot just by her head. She complained to him of her miserable plight. Baba said, "Why feel so bad about it? I have kept a *talisman* in that shelf. You wear it and you will be alright. Throw it off on the third day", and he at once walked out of the room. "Baba, in which shelf do you mean?" she was crying.

Her relations woke up at her cries and asked her what the matter was. When she told them of Baba's words, they brushed it aside as a mere delusion. When she insisted, they searched in the shelf and they did find a *talisman* with a yellow thread attached to it. They put it around her neck and at once her diarrhoea subsided. On the third day she threw the *talisman* away in the backyard in a corner. Sri Pillay blamed her for throwing away a thing given by Sai Baba and searched for it in vain. Both Smt. And Sri Pillay sat dejected at not finding it and they even went without

lunch. By 6 p.m. her elder brother came and said that she was right in following Baba's instruction to throw away the *talisman* and that even if she had not done so, Baba could have taken it away as mysteriously as he had given it.

This miracle strengthened their faith and they worshipped Baba with great fervour. But the younger brother and nephew of Smt. Susilamma used to criticise her for worshipping a 'moslem' like Baba. One day when they sat in the hall, something metallic fell from nowhere, with a noise and they found it to be a picture of Baba printed on a metal strip. Smt. Susilamma picked it up, thought that it was a gift from Baba to here child and, after offering incense to it, put it round his neck. The same night her youngest brother and nephew suffered from sudden and unbearable pain in stomach and diarrhoea. Smt. Susilamma told Sri Pillay that both of them spoke light of Baba as a Moslem and the illness might be a consequence of that. Sri Pillay reprimanded them for their impertinence and told them to prostrate to Baba's picture in repentance and to promise that they were relieved of their suffering and that they would name their first born after Baba. As soon as they did so the pain at once vanished. Thus both of them became devotees of Sai and later named their first born after Baba.

There is an instance of Baba saving Smt.Susilamma from a serious scandal. Her sister's son aged 16 was staying with her. Once he wanted his marriage to be performed and elders scolded him for his haste. The boy then swallowed rat poison and was in a critical condition. Doctors gave up hope of his survival. Everyone including her sister said that Smt. Susilamma might have poisoned him out of some grudge against him. So she prayed to Baba to save his life so that he might reveal the truth and save her from the scandal. The boy did survive most miraculously and he confessed what he did and Smt.Susilamma's innocence was thus vindicated. Otherwise the scandal would have been a life-long torture for her.

A little before Sri Pillay retired from service the family was at a village called Maddipadu and their son had finished his post graduate studies with distinction. They whished that their son should get employed. He stayed with their relations, at Tummalagunta, trying for job. In course of time, he got an interview for the post of an attender in the Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. But he said it was not worth while attending it as many applicants with recommendations of big-wigs would attend it and he had no such help. At last as per his mother's wish he attended it. Then he came to Maddipadu. On 24.8.76 Baba appeared to Smt. Susilamma in a dream and said "Your son has got an appointment and the posting order was sent to Tummalagunta. Get them from there and let him join service!" She woke up and told her husband about the dream. He brushed it aside as a mere projection of her own wishful thinking. Baba again appeared in her dream and told her the same the second day. She told her son about it but he too did not pay heed to it. Again on the third day Baba appeared in her dream and said, "Do not mind what your husband says; get the appointment orders from Tummalagunta and send your son to take charge. Do not delay!" The next morning Sri Pillay wrote to their relation who went to Kalahasthi on one month's leave. In reply they received a telegram from Kalahasthi asking their son to join duty immediately. Later they learned that after their relations left for Kalahasthi, the postman threw all letters including the order of appointment in the locked house. Thus Baba had helped the family with a financial prop.

Smt. Susilamma's sight was getting weaker and she was worried that if she had to depend on others owing to want of sight, she was afraid she may not be properly cared for. So she went on praying to Baba for help. One day Sai appeared in her dream and said,"Why do you always cry about your sight? If you want it as I shall grant you the same. But you will have to experience the same fate (*karma*) in your next life. Every one, including I, has to reap his *karmic* effects. Decide whether you wish to finish this balance of *karma* in this life or in the next". Then she suddenly woke up even before she could decide and tell him which she preferred. Yet she went on praying for better sight. At last a doctor operated upon her successfully. She returned home with a bandaged eye in a few days. One night, as she was sleeping on the open terrace, a bat struck her and pulled out the bandage. She suddenly woke up with profuse bleeding of the eye. The doctor examined her and said that the eye was damaged beyond repair.

However, she persuaded him to do his best. He bandaged her eye and kept her in the clinic for a few days. She was all the time praying Baba fervently for help. One night she had a dream. Baba removed the bandage and she could see. Next morning, the doctor removed the bandage and she could see! The doctor was amazed at the miracle. However, she was henceforth obsessed with the fear that in her next life, she has to face the same trouble and prayed. Baba again appeared in her dream. He was annoyed with her. He said, "You always come up with one problem or the other. You feed eleven blind ones and offer as many coconuts to God. You will be free from the evil *karma* forever!"

Baba appeared to her on one more occasion. When her only son was getting married, not one of her brothers attended it owing to some misunderstanding in their family. She complained to Baba saying "Sai, see; No one is going to attend the marriage of my only son". Sai appeared in her dream. "Why do you worry about all matters-small and big?" he said, "Go on chanting this mantra —

'Sri Rama Rama Rameti
Rame Rame Manorame;
Sahasra nama tattulyam
Rama nama varanane!'

You will have no more difficulties". She told the matter to her husband and he told her that it was a powerful *mantra*. So Baba had in short bestowed on her progeny, health, sustenance and spiritual instruction and had warded off many difficulties such as illness and scandal.

Smt. and Sri S.N. Pradhan of Bombay (Santha Cruz) were devotees of Sai Baba. Once they were financially hard-pressed and felt that Baba did not grace them with any experience. After reading the life history of Baba they wanted to visit Shirdi but Mr. Pradhan was ill. On 10-11-1953 before going to bed he fervently prayed to Baba to take him to Shirdi. He felt the inner call too. The next morning, while preparing *chapathis*, his wife noticed that footprints of Sai Baba were present, mysteriously impressed on the lid of the butter-can. Soon their neighbour who wasn't a devotee of Baba told them that he had a dream on the previous night: "That *fakir* in that photo in Pradhan's house" came to his house but he drove the *fakir* out; the *fakir* then entered Pradhan's house. This corroborated the fact that Baba did visit Pradhan's house in his subtle form. So, too Baba's footprints appeared in the house of a Sai devotee, Tejaswini Rele. Later Baba appeared to her in a dream and told her that he had granted her wish to see his footprints.

We shall now note an instance which shows that when a devotee invokes the name of Baba in distress, it could mean the invocation of some other saint. One R.Morewallah, solicitor of Bombay was going to Thana by train. Owing to crowding he could not board the train properly. The train moved and he slipped and fell down. In fright he cried out 'Sai'! An old man pulled the chain and held him securely. The train stopped. The railway guard came to enquire but the old man was nowhere to be seen. Later when Morewallah's son visited a saint, the latter said. "Had I not saved your father's life in 1953?"

Mrs. Mani Sahukar the famous writer of *Sai Baba - the Saint of Shirdi* was a fine songstress. Once she suffered from a strange congestion in her throat which no medicines could relieve. She could not sing even for a short while. She visited Shirdi and prayed to Baba at the samadhi mandir. When she later returned to her room she felt a rustling in her sari. When she looked it up, she found that it was a packet of homeopathic tablets. she took the same as Baba's *prasad* and soon her throat was cleared!

On 13-11-1918 Baba appeared to devotee Kaka Mahajani in his dream and said "Why, are you still sleeping? Wake up and worship me. Today is the thirtieth day ceremony after my *mahasamadhi*." Kaka woke up and found it to be so. He at once arranged the celebration and invited Kaka Saheb Dixit, Pradhan and Dabholkar for dinner. They all sang Baba's *bhajan* the whole day.

Mr. Ravindranath Banerjee, Advocate, Howrah Cantonment, has left a note dated 2-2-1975 with a devotee at Shirdi. He writes:-

"One day about a year ago, while I was sitting inside Government pleader's chamber at Howrah Court, Baba suddenly entered the chamber and took me outside and spoke a few words and then I could not see him. Probably he had vanished. I then returned to the chamber. The Government pleader sitting in front of me said, to my utter surprise, 'I know that Sai Baba has come to you'. Thereafter many miracles took place in my life. I am an ordinary man. I do not know why God has selected me as His instrument to do some work".

On a Thursday in 1953 *prasad* was distributed at the Sai Baba *mandir* in Ahmedabad. They gave different *prasad* to different people, *pedas* to some and mangoes to others. Smt. Manorama, wife of Mr. Chandlal Mehta was upset at the seeming discrimination shown to the devotees in the name of Sai Baba. On her way home a stranger met her and gave her a bag containing *pedas*, mangoes, *udi* and Rs.1.14.00. The stranger said that her husband had sent them for her. Later when her husband returned home, he heard of the incident and was amazed. For he had sent no such for her.It was evident that Sai Baba had responded to her unspoken thought and demonstrated once again that all are equal in his eyes and that he is ever ready to respond to the call of his devotees.

The Tomb that speaks and moves

D. Sriramulu was in acute financial crisis when his wife was seriously ill and he had to attend to his young children. Every day he fervently sought Baba's help. One morning, as he set out, Sai Baba appeared physically at the threshold. To make sure, Sriramulu enquired in amazement, "Who are you"? "What a fool you are! You'll know it only if you know who you are!", said Baba. "Be pleased to dine with us!", Sriramulu said, "I've come for that!", the visitor replied and added, "Tell your wife to serve me food!" The poor housewife got down from the bed and, with great difficulty, served him. When Sriramulu returned from the bazar with bananas, Baba had left. Within hours, his wife was quite well! Baba has ever after favoured her with his blessings. Once she felt sorry for losing a good picture of Sai. That night, Sai appeared in her dream, threw many of his pictures at her and told her to pick up whichever she liked and she did. The next morning, a devotee just returned from Shirdi and presented her with a like one!

One evening, Mr. Pathak, the former Court Receiver of Sri Sai Samsthanam, Shirdi, received an urgent message that 600 devotees were visiting Shirdi that night. He needed Rs.1,200/- to make boarding arrangements for them but by that time, the day's collections of the Samsthan funds were already deposited in the treasury. When he was worried about it, two villagers entered his office and said that they wanted to pay Rs.600/- to the office for feeding devotees. He told them to see him the next morning as the office was closed and no payments could then be accepted. They said that they were in a hurry and requested him to accept their money and arrange for the feeding on the next morning. Mr. Pathak accepted it. One of them mentioned his name as Shirdikar (i.e., a native of Shirdi). After they went away, Mr. Pathak remembered that he had not thanked them for their timely contribution and sent the office-peons to call them, but there were no such anywhere! Three days later, an old devotee of Baba, Dr. Gawankar, came from Bombay and said to Mr. Pathak, "Three days ago, I had a dream in which I saw Sai Baba and Abdul Baba enter your office and give you some money."

Dr. Rajagoplaachari (Nellore) was once presented with a picture of Baba by a friend. He got it framed and fixed it on the wall and forgot all about it. One night, a *fakir* with boils all over his legs, appeared in his dream. Next morning, he casually glanced at Baba's picture and noticed that he was the *fakir*. The picture of Sai was eaten up by white ants, exactly up to its legs. The doctor realized that Sai is one with his picture and started worshipping it.

Mr. V. Narayana Rao of Hyderabad sums up his experience thus: "In May 1979, we came to know that Sri Bharadwaja was in Hyderabad. Our long cherished wish to meet him was at last fulfilled and I was pleasantly surprised to know that I knew him earlier as a teacher, when I studied, in an evening college. One day he suggested that all of us, devotees of Sai, should conduct a weekly spiritual gathering where we can read the life of Sai Baba and sing *bhajans*. We commenced the activity on the next saturday in his company. We had the opportunity of meeting him every day as long as he was in the city and clear many of our doubts. He attended our second weekly gathering also. My son-in-law who did not participate in the *satsang* recounted his experience to me as follows: 'During the *satsang*, I was resting on a cot in the open frontyard of our house. Suddenly I went into the house, peeped and looked at Sai Baba's picture there. At the bottom of the picture was printed his saying. "If you look to me I look to you". I mentally addressed Sai, "How far is your statement true? I shall believe you only if I am blessed

with an experience. Else, I shall consider this *satsang* as an absurdity." Then I came into the bed room, stood in front of Baba's picture there and looked at his eyes. After two or three minutes I felt that the whole room was illuminated with a light of thousands of candlepower. My eyes dazzled and my body felt light, as though floating in the air, I felt something like an electric current passing through my body and I was afraid that I may fall down. At once I addressed Baba mentally, 'Now I believe you. I shall take your darshan', and bowed to him. Immediately, I regained my normal state. The mystic current had left me even like the air from a pricked bubble. I believe that it was an experience bestowed on me by Sai in response to my prayer. I only pray that all the members of our group should realize the full significance of such an experience."

Mr.B.Adrishta Rao of Hyderabad records his experiences; "In September 1978, when I was in a troubled state, one of my colleagues gave me a picture of Sai Baba. He assured me that I shall be relieved of my problems by merely keeping it with me. Henceforth, I have been keeping it in my pocket and thinking of Sai now and then, even though I am a Christian by faith, My wife agreed that we should burn incense every morning and evening before the picture and bow to him.

In January 1979, my wife was severely ill and there was little hope of her survival, when I admitted her in the Government hospital. All the four of our children were young, the youngest being a baby of five months. I prayed to Sai to save me from the impending calamity. My wife regained her consciousness the next day and recounted her experience thus: 'Baba appeared in by dream. One of my kinsmen who recently died of cancer was trying to drag me out through the window, holding my head. Baba at once rushed there, dragged the dark form of my kinsman and threw him in blazing flames. I appealed to Baba not to be so cruel to him. Baba said, 'You don't know anything. He is solely responsible for all the hardships of your family and he should be so punished'. Then I requested Baba to be seated. He replied, 'My child, your husband is hard pressed with attending on your children. So I shall go there. You need not fear. You will be
alright in a few days.' Indeed, within a few days, she was alright. Henceforth, she started worshipping Baba with greater zeal. Later, two *fakirs* wearing *kafnis* appeared to her in a dream. When she received them they entered our house and made the sign of a cross on her breast and went away. Even though she was cured of her ailment, my wife continued to be weak. The doctor said that she needed prolonged treatment and it was necessary to take an X-ray picture of her chest. Reposing trust in Baba's assurance, we did not give her any medicines. Still she gradually regained strength.

One night, we went on talking about Baba till 11 p.m. I just went to the bathroom for a minute. During this short interval she dozed and had a dream, Baba appeared before her and ordered her to follow him. 'Baba, I am too weak to walk' she said. 'Do not fear. I shall take you along', said Baba, led her by the hand upto the threshold and, from there, flew along with here to Shirdi. There he told her to break a coconut to his *samadhi*. As she tried to do so, the priest in *mandir* objected saying, 'Get out from here. You are very dirty.' Baba said to him, 'She is my child. You must permit her to break the coconut'. Accordingly, she was permitted to do so. On the *samadhi*, she saw a big plate containing a few small bottles and a white ball of butter. The *samadhi* was glorious to look at in the light of colored bulbs. Then Baba left her back at home before he disappeared. Just then I returned from the bathroom. She woke up and recounted her vision to
me. Baba appeared in her dream now and then and, eversince, we had no problems."

Now, my own experience: In February 1973, I looked at the huge pile of manuscripts which were my collection of Baba's *leelas* and I had a passing thought whether it was all worth the effort. Would it have been better if I had utilized all the time and energy in *japa* and *dhyana?* I wondered how Baba viewed it all. Early next morning, at 3.45 a.m., I had a dream in which someone held paper in front of my eyes. The paper bore the statement, "Pen is a mighty investment". The moment I read this statement, I woke up. Indeed, in retrospect, I feel that it is a mighty spiritual investment. It was a very effective *sadhana* to keep my mind dwelling on Baba for over twelve years. Moreover, the dream proved prophetic in that several works flowed off my pen without much effort.

Baba's protection was extended to dumb creatures also, even long after his *mahasamadhi*. About 1932 there was a breeding bull at Shirdi which was consecrated with the mark of a trident (of Lord Siva) on its forehead. Once when it damaged local gardens in course of its free grazing, all the bigwigs of Shirdi contributed Rs.3/- each and, along with the money, sent it to a *pound* (or cattle-shed) at Yeola through one Bhikku Marvadi. Soon the latter returned to Shirdi and said that he had discharged his duty. But Baba appeared in Apaji Patel's dream that night and told him, "Are you sleeping? I have been tied to the door of a butcher". Immediately he rushed to Yeola and was stunned to learn that the bull was in fact sold to a butcher for Rs.14/-. It was discovered there in time, released and was kept at the *pound*.

The Power of Satsang

The mystics of all religions say that God is the omnipresent Spirit which indwells our being also as our real Self. Sadhana or spiritual effort is the means of realising it which enables us to realize that we are the Immortal Spirit. Beginning as one of our daily activities, as part of life, *sadhana* has to grow up to be our life itself. Rather, our wakeful life will have to become part of our *sadhana*. It has to pervade our deep sleep too, as it did in the case of Sai Baba. Our daily life militates against this endeavour by evoking in us emotional responses like hate, jealousy, greed, fear etc. There are only two ways of conquering this counter-force. One is by running away from normal, worldly life into seclusion. Many seem to prefer this but very few of them succeed in the attainment of their goal. For their inner psychic content still carries with it the worldly impressions of their early life. Craving for fame, comfort, power etc., still lure them away from their original object. Such of them, after making a little headway along the path, are powerfully drawn into the world and they got bogged down by these inner compulsions.

The other way is to raise a smaller world of our own, consisting of a few who are all dedicated to such endeavour as we. We gather a few like-minded people in the evening, at least once a week, study the life of Sai Baba and other Masters together, sing *bhajans* and meditate. As a group, we try to live up to what-ever principles of divine life and outlook we derive from our groop-study. Such weekly gathering is called **satsang**. Gradually, the group attracts many more souls and a powerfull center of spiritual activity takes shape. The venue of *satsang* gets charged with spiritual vibrations which help everyone in his *sadhana*. Besides, even others in the locality unconnected with *satsang* would start getting miraculous experiences and would be drawn into

the group. Such groups, both by practice, precept and service, will be disseminators of the noble way among mankind to enable it grow in love and brotherhood, transcending barriers of race, creed and nationality.

This second form of *sadhana* coupled with individual study, meditation and prayer will form a powerful means of not only unfolding our own divine potential, but also of social uplift through the much needed spiritual education.

Mr. Gopalareddy, a native of the neighbouring village of Kothapalem, records his experience:

"Our baby 'Malli' on the 14th day after her birth was being brought home from the maternity hospital at Nellore. I was handing over the baby from the railway platform (at Nellore station) to my wife who had boarded the train. Unfortunately the baby slipped from the rubber sheat in my hands and fell down between the train and the platform. It did not cry. We could not make out where it was badly hit. The baby was disabled. Her hands and legs became useless. The doctors tried their best but could only save its life. The disabled limbs remained so. The baby did not grow up well but remained thin. She could not walk, but dragged her legs along as she moved on her buttocks. Even at the age of four the girl could not speak. We were heart-broken at her condition, and we were helpless. We left everything to God's will.

After quite some time we happened to hear of Sri Bharadwaja through my nephew Vijayakumar (who was a student of the college in which Sri Bharadwaja was working). We wanted to see him but the time had not come for us yet. Atlast, by Baba's grace, he visited our house. We put the sad plight of our four-year-old daughter before him. He glanced at her benignly, passed his hands over her limbs and said that by Baba's grace the child would recover. He then gave the girl the sweet that he had offered to Baba's picture. To our surprise the girl started walking from the next day; now she can run, and climb the staircase. She has gained her speech. Now she sings Baba's *bhajan*. By Baba's grace, both of us – my wife and I have improved much, materially and spiritually".

Mr. M.K. Anandavenkateswarlu, a native of Dhone (Kurnool Dt.) records his experience:

"My third brother Seshumani lost the use of his left leg, left hand, and the left eye on account of polio which he had in his third month. Even at the age of ten years, he could not stand. Owing to some financial and domestic problems, we could not provide him with any medical aid.

Last year when I was doing my M.Sc., in Statistics in S.V. University at Tirupati, I heard of Sri Bharadwaja through my friends and I met him when he visited Tirupati. In his presence I experienced deep peace. I had a feeling that with his blessings my brother might recover.

After the M.Sc., examinations I went to Vidyanagar to see him. That evening he read out from his book on Sri Sai Baba the chapter "Sai Baba is in All Saints". Just at that time Sri Samartha Narayana Maharaj, the saint of Harihar, visited the house of Sri Bharadwaja. He listened to my account of my brother's condition, gave me holy ash and told me to apply it to my brother's body while reciting the forty verses addressed to Sri Hanuman (*'Hanuman Chalisa'*). As the holy ash is too little in quantity he told me to take some more from Sri Bharadwaja. When I returned

to Tirupati I had sent the ash home through my second brother. As the members of my family at home did not have the text of *Sri Hanuman Chalisa* to be recited, they did not apply the ash to my brother's body. But strangely enough from the fourth day of the ash reaching our home, my brother who till then was unable even to stand started moving about with the help of a stick. All my people were surprised at this. But before I came to know of this miracle, one day, early in the morning, I had a dream. Sri Baba was there surrounded by devotees of whom I was one. Pointing at me he told the others, "It is I that had saved this lame one". I at once woke up, wondering what this could mean and looked at Baba's picture. At once it occurred to me that Baba was just cryptically referring to my brother. After a few days I went home and to my surprise and that of others my brother was walking about with the help of a stick even though the ash was not applied to his body. Many people of that town were surprised at it. All of us thought it was all the grace of Baba. My unquestionable conviction in the existence of God came from my brother's recovery without any medical assistance".

Mr. M. Ramachandra Rao, an employee of the Posts and Telegraphs department, writes:

"One evening I visited Sri Bharadwaja at Vidyanagar. The next morning I had to attend an interview at Nellore for the post of a clerk in P. & T. Dept. I had to catch the 5 o' clock bus next morning. But we went on talking late in the night; besides, I am a late riser. So I requested Sri Bharadwaja to wake me up at 4-30 a.m. He agreed and set the alarm of the timepiece for that hour. I slept deeply and I had a vivid dream in which a stranger appeared at the eastern window of the room and said, 'It is morning. Wake up and start for the interview'. I at once woke up and looked about but there was none at the window. I found that the timepiece had stopped functioning at 4 a.m. That was why the alarm did not ring. It was about 5 a.m. I realized that Baba himself thus appeared in my dream to wake me up at the right time. Thereby he not only blessed me spiritually with faith in his watchfulness over my welfare but also obtained for me a livelihood".

Mrs. P. Sulochana, an old student of the college at Vidyanagar writes:

"I come from a village, Mettu, near Vidyanagar. I came to know of Sri Bharadwaja and his devotion to Sri Sai. So once I visited him along with my mother. I wished that my mother who was devotional by temperament would have a chance to listen to him. Incidentally we told him that once we had the picture of Sri Sai Baba in our *shrine* and that we later gave it away to one of our friends. He asked us to get it back, if possible, and worship it again which would do us good. We did accordingly and started reading the biography of the saint with devotion.

My father was a sceptic who considered all this as mere superstition though he did not object to our devotions. He was suffering from a strange ailment. Even if he walked a furlong, his legs would swell and pain so severely that he could not but weep and roll on the ground. All medical treatment failed. One day my mother told him of the miraculous cures effected by Baba and suggested that he should seek His protection. 'What shall I lose? If I am cured it is well. Otherwise nothing is lost,' so saying he at once vowed to Baba that he would visit Shirdi, if he was cured. Miraculously, the pain vanished and now he is able of walk any distance normally.

Faith atlast had struck root in his heart and he had ever been praying to Baba. One night Baba

appeared in his dream, showed him a native of our village and said, 'This man is about to enter your house for committing theft. Take care.' My father atonce woke up, secured all the doors of the house and slept peacefully. The next morning, the person shown by Baba in the dream happened to meet him. Just to verify the dream message of Baba, my father accosted him, 'Hello! How is it that you were moving about in our street at midnight?', pretending to have actually seen him. The man was stunned, and said, 'Yes! How did you know? Our calf was not to be seen and I came in search of it'. The manner of his response clearly showed that it was a cover up. Baba has thus been ever watchful of our interests".

Now, I shall mention experiences of a few others which had a clearly spiritual significance. Mr. B. Ramakrishna Reddy who was my student here reports:

"I joined the college at Vidyanagar in 1970 for my intermediate studies. My father was a devout soul and as per his instruction, I used to worship Lord Sri Rama since my boyhood. But owing to the influence of the friends and associates at the college, my faith had all but died. I was afraid of being laughed at by my fellows. So I used to pray secretly for a short while (just to keep up my word given to my father) and spent the rest of it in going to pictures, gossip and wandering. It was in that state that I came into contact with Sri Bharadwaja. The conversation at the very first meeting keenly awakened all my devotional instincts and my weakness for gossip, movies and wandering disappeared. Even without my conscious striving, right habits made their abode in my being. Therefore I used to spend some time in his presence everyday.

When I was in the ninth standard, my father used to visit a saint, Sri Avadhuta Venkaiah Swami who stays in a village called Golagamudi in this (Nellore) district. Once while speaking of me he told my father that I would persecute my collegiate studies in Nellore Dt. and I would meet my *guru* there. When I later visited him, the saint told me the same. His prophecy came true. I happened to join the college at Vidyanagar and I contacted Sri Bharadwaja whom I came to consider as my *guru*.

"The object of my master's worship is Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, while I worshipped Lord Sri Rama. One day I said to my Master, 'Sir, As I have been coming to you quite often and listnening to the accounts of Baba's grace, it has developed in me the urge to worship Sai Baba. What should I do?' 'You will yourself come to know what you should do', he replied. So I continued to worship Lord Sri Rama as usual. With the blessings of my Master I took the *darshan* of *Avadhuta* of Chirala, the *Avadhuta* of Cuddapah and others.

After some time I expressed the same doubt to my Master who repeated the same reply. Within two or three weeks Sri Sai Baba appeared to me clearly in my dream and said, 'You meditate on my form. It will do you good. Rama and I are not different from each other'. When I reported this experience to my Master, he said, 'That's what I meant when I said you'll know it yourself'. What is remarkable about this experience is that I hardly ever dream. But ever since I had this experience Sri Baba has been appearing in my dreams now and then.

In March 1975 I was suffering from partial headaches often and I told my Master about it. 'What can it do? It will cease of itself', he said. One day I went to Nellore to see Holy Mother of Jillellamudi who was, then, visiting that town. That day I had a severe headache. That night, in

my dream I saw Baba emerging from the small photograph in my pocket. He sat on my right side, kept his hand on my head and glanced most lovingly at me and disappered. The headache vanished by the time I woke up. Thereafter I never had it again.

On 10th April 1975, my master left for his in-law's place (Banaganpalle, Kurnool Dt.). He had instructed me to conduct the ceremonial worship of Baba's picture in his house. On the night of 13th I meditated for an hour and half and went to bed. I did not yet fall asleep. It was not sleep but was a peculiar state. Baba, vividly appeared standing before me saying, 'Get up, get up!' and added, 'Your father owes me five coconuts since long. He vowed to offer them to Siva but has not fulfilled it, of these you offer three here on Thursday without fail!' As he said so, I was blinking at him in amazement. Sai repeated the same words, then I bowed to his feet. He sat down facing north, and said 'Who is your *guru*?' Unhesitatingly I replied 'Sri Bharadwaja is my *guru*'. Then he told me some words and insisted that I should keep them secret. He also told me to do *parayana* (devout study) of his life in three days. Tears flowed from my eyes. A zero-watt bulb was glowing in the room. In the dim light I found there were four black dogs around him. I was quite frightened and I switched on the light. Just before my very eyes Baba disappeared.

I could not sleep for the rest of the night. At first I did not tell any one about my experience the next morning. Later I told my friend Krishnamurthy about it. Both of us came to a decision. Without writing anything of my experience to my father I was to write a letter to him to verify the objective truth of the dream – message. I wrote to him to this effect: 'Have you ever vowed to offer anything in the temple to Lord Siva? And if so have you fulfilled the vow? As this concerns a deity please reply immediately!'.

Before I received any reply I offered three coconuts to Baba in my Master's house the next Thursday to obey his command. Later I received a reply from my father to this effect. 'Many years ago I vowed to Siva that I would offer five coconuts. I have not fulfilled it so far. I am thinking of doing so soon'. I was overjoyed to note that what Baba said was true.

Later, when my Master returned from Shirdi he sat facing north, even as Sri Baba did in my vision. I was surprised at it. For, till then he always sat facing the east. So I asked him, 'How is it you have changed your former habit and sat this wise?' Then I narrated to him my experience. "Yes, at the time Baba appeared to you sitting in this fashion, I was saying to my wife at Shirdi.
'In the prayer hall at Vidyanagar henceforth I will have to sit facing north,'" my Master said and I was still more surprised at this.

Mr. U. Srinivasamurthy, another student and a regular member of our *bhajan*, records:

"In my boyhood I accompanied my friend to the neighboring village. On the way, in a bush, I found a small stone idol. Curiously we looked at it closely. It was the figure of a man and he has a head-dress and a beard. One of his legs was resting across the other. I went and picked it up. I do not now remember where I took it and what I did it."

"After I joined the college at Vidyanagar I had the good fortune of coming into contact with our Master, Sri E. Bharadwaja. When I first saw the picture of Sai Baba in his room, I at once remembered the stone image that I had picked up in my boyhood. Besides attending *bhajan*

every Thursday, I used to visit him often on other days also. One day a strange and unforgettable experience was in store for me.

That day I visited my Master at about 6 p.m. Several students were sitting there. The Master was talking on several spiritual matters. At about 9 a.m. every one else had left. I decided to stay there for the night. Later on, my Master and I were resting on the terrace. After a little while, he said, 'I forgot to keep the bucket and the water vessel down inside the room. Go and keep them!' Accordingly I came down and, opening the door to keep the things in, I was terrified at the sight. My heart missed the beat and my legs were shivering. I was rooted as it were to the ground. There, before my very eyes was Sai Baba resting on the mat, with his head on his forearm. In the midst of the fright a doubt flashed in me whether that was a mere illusion. I atonce closed my eyes and opened again. It was not an illusion! Sai Baba himself was there! My fright doubled; somehow I managed to push the bucket and the vessel into the room and locked the door. I told my Master about that. My Master told me not to fear, as it was a common experience for devotees who often remembered Sai. This was the most memorable incident in my life."

Another student, N. Sridhar writes :

"One day I said to Sri Bharadwaja, 'Sir I always have an inexplicable fear. Can you suggest a way out?' 'Are you sincere about it?' he asked and I affirmed. 'The medicine a doctor prescribes may be bitter but you should not abandon it on that account', he said. I agreed. He then suggested to me to repeat a Divine Name and asked me which deity I love most. I told him that I love Sri Rama. He then told me to repeat *Ramanam*. Owing to my previous prejudices against such practices I asked him, 'Can you assure me that my sanity would not be endangered?' He assured me and said that saints would grace me with their darshan if I practice it with devotion. Indeed, after a little practice I happened to see Sri Satchidanande Ganapati who gave me a rosary. Later I had the opportunity of accompanying my Master to Jillellamudi for the *darshan* of the Holy Mother. Subsequently I had the good luck of seeing Sri Ranganna Babu of Guntur. Yet I could not concentrate my mind well on *Ramanam*. Correspondingly the reception I had from him was not favourable.

One day I complained to my teacher, 'When I contemplate on Sri Rama before retiring to bed at night as per your instruction, he does not occur to me as my protector or the manifestation of grace; I am not thrilled. As he is God, he seems to me the cause of creation and thus of all suffering'. My teacher then suggested that I had better choose a saint as the object of my devotion.

I used to derive immense peace by listening to the accounts of Baba. I also heard of the experience of my fellow student Ramakrishna Reddy, a devotee of Sri Rama, being told by Sri Sai Baba in his dream that He and Rama were not different. A devotee of Sri Satya Sai Baba was also, in a dream, given a picture of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi for worship. One Thursday, my Master was reading out the experience of Sai devotees Chinna Kisna Raja Saheb and Nachne and he said to me, 'This is for you!' with the blessings of my Master and by the grace of Sri Sai I had the following dream one night:

I went to see Sri Ranganna Babu, the great Ramabhaktha of Guntur and he was angry with me for my impure thoughts. He angrily pointed at a road that was on the right side and said, 'Go'. As I walked that way as per his command, I came to a neem (margosa) tree with a platform around it. There was a picture of Sri Sai Baba. When I looked at it I had a feeling that I myself had left it there long ago and I had painted the clothes of Baba in the picture in red color.

I described the dream to my Master. He told me often that Sri Sai and his picture are not different and that this fact is borne out by the experience of Hemadpanth, Balabua, and Shama. Hence I understood from this dream that Sai Baba is my chosen object of worship. Of the several things that my Master had told me was that our relationship to our *guru* would be fixed at the very moment of creation. Besides, I experienced immense peace after choosing Baba as my deity. Subsequently I had the *darshan* of saints like the Swamy of Poondi (Tamil Nadu), the senior Swami Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Sri Satya Sai Baba and Sri Samartha Narayana Maharaj.

"Recently, when Sri Narayana Maharaj visited a nearby village I went to see him along with my Master. Before we went to bed that night the Swami said, 'You have learnt the germ of your spiritual life of a previous birth in a dream'. I understood that he was referring to my dream vision of Sai Baba's picture".

On 12th of December, 1974 Baba had graced some devotees of our group with the following wonderful dream experiences :

To a devotee of the neighboring village of Kothapalem he appeared in the form of a picture of his. The same night another devotee of the village of Ucchurivaripalem had the same dream. The same evening Mr.Seshadri a devotee, had given me two big pictures of Baba. The next evening the two devotees who had the dream visions came to Vidyanagar to narrate their experiences to me. The one from Kothapalem, however, wished in his heart that even without his telling me of his vision I should give him a picture of Baba and that was to be the sure sign from Baba that his experience was not a casual dream. By the time these devotees arrived, nearly half-a-dozen other devotees had assembled in my room. Strangely enough I was impelled to present these two devotees, among all with the two pictures of Baba! Later they recounted their dream experiences with exaltation. What was remarkable was that the pictures were exact replicas of those they had seen in their dreams!

The same night on which these two devotees had these dream visions, Kumari Koteswari, the daughter of a temple priest in the nearby village of Ucchurivaripalem had a still more remarkable, experience. Sometime earlier the priest, her father, came and told me that his daughter was suffering from enlarged tonsils since her childhood that his friends told him that he must get them removed surgically at the earliest possible time that owing to this trouble, even though the girl had attained marriageable age she remained stunted in growth. He also said that his circumstances did not permit him to give proper treatment for her and he was very much worried on her account. He was sent to me by Mr. Seshadri, an old student and a devotee of Sai, of that village. I told the priest that instead of vainly worrying over his inability to help his daughter, he could as well narrate the *leelas* of Sri Baba to his family every evening. Henceforth he did so accordingly. Some time later, on the night on which the two devotees mentioned above had the dream-vision of Sai Baba's pictures, Baba appeared to the girl in her dream. On 11-3-76

she recounted her experience thus:

On the night of Thursday, the 12th of December 1974, I got a dream. I was admitted in a hospital. Sai appeared as the doctor, the deity Poleramma as the nurse and the deity Kshetra Polaiah as the compounder. They seated me in a chair and he told me to open my mouth. I cried out in fright. Poleramma assured me that I need not fear and told me to open my mouth. So I did. Baba performed an operation at the spot of pain. When I woke up I found that I was free from all pain and that my ailment was eradicated. It is nearly sixteen months since I got this dream and the trouble never recurred.

Mamilla Subbamma, an unlettered old lady of Krishnapuram village in Nellore Dt., aged about sixty, communicated her experiences of Baba's grace to the present author. Some time ago, a strange *fakir* appeared to her in a dream, and she bowed to him even though she did not know who he was. Then he said, 'Visit me once'. Later the members of her family happened to worship Sai Baba and then she recognized that the *fakir* who had appeared in her dream was he.

Subbamma was ailing for quite long and the complaints were legion. The most prominent of these were pain in the eyes, body pains and spitting of blood often. All the doctors of that area who had examined expressed their inability to cure her and advised her to consult specialists elsewhere. Once she had severe cold and fever which rendered these complaints unbearable. She was helpless. One night she silently prayed to Baba to cure her and then went to bed at night. Early next morning Baba appeared in her dream. He came near her bed and squeezed the juice of some leaves into her ear. She was aiding the flow of the juice by shaking her earlobe. The juice flowed into her mouth and it tasted very pleasant. As she was wishing to taste it longer, she woke up. There was no sign of juice poured in her ear. But most wonderful, all her complaints had completely vanished by next morning, including the spitting of blood! Her health became better than before. She who was unable to take proper care of herself earlier was then able to assist her grand-children who were studying at Vidyanagar.

Later on another occasion, she was alone at home, all the other members of the family having gone elsewhere, she had to do all the work alone. One day she had body pains. The next day was the one allotted to her by co-cultivators for watering her fields with the engine. If she failed to attend to this work, she would loose the chance and cultivation would suffer. But it seemed impossible for her to attend to the work owing to her illness. So she fervently prayed to Baba to set right everything and went to bed. Baba again appeared in her dream and showed her some castor oil in his hand. She does not clearly remember whether Baba himself applied it to her or gave her the oil to do so. Soon she woke up and found that she was quite healthy. She could attend to all the work single-handed and could even water the fields!

Not only when he lived in flesh and blood but even today, Sai Baba is a sure guide to the spiritual goal and that even for those who have gone far along the path of *sadhana*.

M. Venugopal Reddy of Manepalli village (Hindupur Taluk, A.P.) was a budding saint. Since his nonage he had been having a mystic experience. Whenever he closed his eyes he saw a mystic light between his eyebrows. The sight of it enchanted him and he spent all his time attending to it. Seeing him quite uninterested in play and other boyhood pastimes, his parents suspected that

he was troubled by spirit-possession and took him to several witch-doctors. But all their efforts proved in vain. At last, a *sadhu* assured them all, that the boy suffered no spirit-possession and that he was gifted with a mystical experience. He even suggested a few guidelines for the boy's practice.

A few years after, Venugopal started seeing Goddess Lakshmi in the centre of the inner light. She spoke to him, and even gave him holy articles like *sivalingas*, small idols, *vibhuti*, *kumkum*, etc. He had been in this stage of development for a few years. At length he visited many a holy person for guidance. Even Sri Purnananda Swami of Srisailam told Venugopal, that he is in no need of a human *guru* and that the Goddess would herself take care of him.

On hearing of Venugopal I was happy but I was concerned for his proper development. For many are the seekers who, after evolving to such a state have stumbled and fell morally too. On 2-1-78 I had been at Shirdi and his case flashed in my mind. On my way back, on 8th I visited Venugopal at his village. He told me of his yearning for further guidance along his devotional way. And he sought my counsel. I suggested to him that he should fix his mind on Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi as his *guru*. Venugopal was immensely happy. For, just a few days earlier, he asked the Goddess to take him to the higher stages of meditation. She smiled and kept quiet. At last he asked her to suggest a way to attain higher spiritual states. She told him to look upon Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi as his *guru*. And I, on my way back from Shirdi, happened to give him the same piece of advice.

On 22-5-78, he wrote to me :

"Since 20th I have been longing strongly to visit Vidyanagar. The reasons, I feel is your spiritual energy. On Tuesday, 21st at 7-40 p.m. when I was meditating, I had your *darshan*. I then meditated intently on the Mother, she at once appeared to me and said, 'You go there at once' I was very happy…. On 22nd at 9-10 p.m. I opened your book *Sri Sai Leelamritamu*'. I again had your *darshan*. I then remembered that I have to visit you … On Thursday the 23rd at 5-54 p.m. I finished reading four Chapters of Sri Guru Charitra and I was about to commence the 5th chapter. A passing thought of visiting Vidyanagar flashed. Immediately I heard a few words: 'Do not worry about money … You start at once for Vidyanagar'. These were not the words of the Mother. They were very majestic and profound. It occurred to me that they were the words of Sri Sai Baba. Soon after I experienced the state of profound *samadhi* for four hours.

Accordingly, Venugopal came and stayed with me for a week. During this stay, he studied the life-histories of great saints like Sri Manikya Prabhu, Sri Swami Samarth, Yogi Milarepa of Tibet, and of a few mystics I had visited. One day the Goddess ordered him to visit the *mandir* site here and giving him yellow rice (*akshatas*), asked him to sprinkle them around the site. She told him that the mandir construction will be successfully accomplished and that it would rise into prominence.

One day I had a dream in which I was shown a copper plate on which was inscribed the messages in Telugu, "Venugopal is most likely to be caught in the snare of miracles and fall spiritually". After much thought, I felt obliged to write the same to him. On 22-5-78 he replied :

"In your letter you wrote of the likelihood of a fall through miracles. You are quite right and I am very happy for it. In the course of *sadhana*, miracles do manifest. In order to attain perfection, they have to be left off. A higher stage should be attained. I have a little experience of that state above miracles. But I can stay in that state only for a short while and I at once return to the stage of miracles. Again with a little effort I regain the higher state and so on. In that higher state, the body, world and mind do not exist (for me). It is empty. This state lasts only for an hour in a day. I have read in the lives of perfect sages that they exist in that higher stage always. Sri Purnanandaswami told me that it is *nirvikalpa samadhi*. I have been trying to be in this state. When I asked Mother about it she told me that I would attain this state after some time. Sri Sivabalayogi also told me the same…..

Whenever I ask Mother for that state she turns my mind towards Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi. When I concentrate on him, I am able to stay in this higher state longer. You too should pray to Baba that I should attain it early.

On 1-6-78 I had been to Shirdi. I stayed there for three days. Baba's *darshan* and the atmosphere there is quite elevating. Ever since I had the *darshan* of Baba, there is a change in my spiritual state.

Hither to I was able to stay in *dhyana*, only for short spells. Rest of the time I have been attending to agriculture. But since I had Baba's *darshan* I am able to stay in *dhyana* for a long time. The change is such as is brought by a magnet in a piece of iron. My mind is not in a mood to attend to agriculture at all. By Baba's grace, the need for me to do so no longer exists. I am able to devote most of my time to Baba's service alone.

Sd. "M. Venugopal"

On November 30, the same *sadhu* wrote, "On Saturday, July 22 I wished to pass the whole day in *dhyana*. I sat for meditation at 9 p.m., after dinner. At 10.46, the Divine Mother appeared and said, 'At dawn you'll be blessed with the *guru's prasadam*!' I asked 'Who is my *guru* other than you?' 'Who else! You'll be graced with perfect *darshan* and *prasadam* of Sai Baba!,' She replied. I sat, my mind concentrated on the silent repetition of Baba's name. At about 2.20 a.m., I rested for a while, when I heard the gingling sound of trinkets and I heard Mother's voice, 'Sit in meditation. You'll receive the *guru's prasadam*!' As it was night, I was a little scared. Precisely at 3-30 a.m., suddenly the whole room was illumined by a mysterious light. With the joy of expectation on one side and awe on the other, I was chanting the name of Baba. Suddenly, I saw Baba standing slightly to my right side. In order to check up whether I was awake, I stirred a little. Baba smiled and said, 'You, son of goddess Lakshmi, take this!', as he put something resembling *udi* in my hand. Dumb-founded, I kept gazing on him. His eyes were a little red and awesome, but his face was beautiful with a smile. He uttered something resembling Marathi and I could not understand it. He smiled and said in Telugu, 'Keep this safe in your shrine of daily worship. When taken a little with milk, it will cure diseases!' I heard the noise of a group of devotees singing *bhajans*, probably in Hindi. Baba had two alms-bags in his left-hand. The word *nishta* appeared on one of them and *saburi* on the other. He threw the bags at me. 'Always

cultivate these two,' he said. His right hand carried nothing. Smoke, like that of incense, was passing up in front of him. With awe and reverence I prayed, 'Baba, I wish to abide always in the state of *samadhi*'. 'It is not necessary to be so. Meditate for six hours in a day. Always chant, 'Om Saibaba'. That is enough. Whenever you encounter any obstacle in *dhyana*, recollect this experience of yours'. A few minutes after, it seemed as if devotees approached him for *arti* and he at once vanished. 'Baba Baba!' I cried out and fell down. The whole room was enveloped in darkness. It was 5-45 a.m., by then. The *udi* that Baba gave was intact in my hand".
On a Thursday in 1975, one of my colleagues had introduced his guest, Mr.Raghu to me at Vidyanagar. He spoke to me for a few hours and left. A few days later, he wrote the following letter from Madras (dated December 10, 1975):

"Dear Sri Bharadwaja, on my return journey, When I was walking to the coffee house in the bus stand at Gudur, a lady of about 50 years, wearing ochre robes and holy ash on her brow, called me softly by name. I checked up in surprise whether she found my name written on my books, but there was none. She asked me for 30 paise for tea and said, 'Are you coming from Vidyanagar?' I told her all about my trip. She said that my meeting you is not accidental as I supposed, but was ordained and said, 'Go ahead! Do not stop half-way for any reason'. Ever since, I have been brooding over the uncanny incident: 'Who is she? How did she know my name? What did she mean by saying that my meeting you was ordained? Who has ordained it?'… The same night, I had a dream: I glided in the air to a city where, I was told, a great saint has arrived. When I prostrated to his feet, he said lovingly, 'You too do it formally? Recite the appropriate *mantra* while prostrating!' After I did, I woke up and it was dawn. What a wonderful dream! The saint with his beard and white clothes looked exactly like Sai Baba. My duty henceforth is to devote all my time and energy for Baba. The Lord said that before blessing His devotee fully, He would take away everything and there is no doubt about it. I've resigned my job. I'm aware that before I reach my goal, I will have to face much hardship… I wish to visit some sacred temples and gain peace of mind. First, I wish to visit Sai Baba at Shirdi and
thereafter, Sri Swami Samarth at Akkalkot. I fully believe that Baba will guide me aright… After sometime, I hope I would be able to come for your *darshan*. Convey my regards to my friends. Yours, Raghu". The bird of Baba's flock fled the cage?

At Ongole

Having noted the fine fruits of *satsang* at Vidyanagar, let us now turn to a few of such at other places :

In 1978, Mr. Subbaiah of Ongole once chanced to stumble upon a copy of Sri Saileelamritm [1] . He perused it, though with the reservation that it concerned 'a moslem *fakir*' and 'related to religious nonsense'. But as he turned the pages, he was charmed by the catholicity of Baba's teaching and his supreme power that operated under the garb of a poor begging *fakir*. Shortly after, he happened to visit Shirdi along with his family. His zeal and devotion grew stronger. He shared his zeal with his fellows and soon regular weekly *satsangs* commenced at Ongole and their numbers and frequency grew. The main factor in all this are the personal experiences of Baba's grace which the devotees had.

Late in the evening one Sunday, *satsang* was going on in a small temple. Mrs. Iswaramma, an ardent spiritual seeker was witnessing it from a distant spot near a snake pit. Suddenly, she

witnessed a strange glow emerge and it enveloped the congregation in the form of a globe. She could even see the faces in the congregation individually in that glow. She thereby testified that the whole group was under the protection of Sai Baba. Later, one Mr. Srinivasa Rao from Ongole visited Sri Samarth Narayana Maharaj in Hyderabad. The latter said, "*Satsang* and *bhajan* have been going on very well at your place. With the inspiration of Bharadwaja, a huge Sai Baba *mandir* is going to take shape there."

On December 13, 1980 *satsang* was performed at the house of Mr. Seetharama Murthi. Mrs. Murthi who is an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna read the chapter, "The *Guru* is all Gods" in the life of Sai Baba and was thrilled. However, she felt that there were no instances in the book, of Baba having appeared to devotees in the form of her beloved deity, Lord Krishna ('The godman of sky blue complexion'). The same evening, she noticed that the black-and-white framed picture of Baba had mysteriously turned sky-blue in color!! Some of her neighbours remarked that it was an indication that Baba was displeased with her services. She panicked and picked up chits or lots to ascertain the truth. The chit that turned up every time indicated that Baba was pleased with her service. The same night, Baba appeared in her dream and said that he visited her house and that she was needlessly panicked by the signs, that if she put three flowers on the picture the next day, he would depart. She did accordingly. By evening on the next day, the picture turned to its original color! Thus has Baba demonstrated to the lady that Lord Krishna and he were not different from his own picture.

Mr. Krishnamurthi, an officer at Ongole, one day attended the *bhajan* at Mr. Seetharamamurthi's house. It was the holy Dattajayanthi day. Suddenly, he had the *darshan* of a mystic light instead of the picture of Baba in the shrine and he was lost in bliss for some time. Soon after, in gratitude, he thought of offering Rs.116/- to the Sai Baba Mandir at Vidyanagar. Later, he was taking his family to his native place, Guntur, in a vehicle. Five or six miles ahead of the destination, three *sannyasis* stood in the middle of the road and stopped the vehicle, hailing, "Sadguru Sainath Maharaj ki Jai!" The next moment, one of them addressed Mr. Krishnamurthi, "Give me the Rs.116/- which you have promised me!" The latter was amazed and said, "I do not have the money. Besides, I vowed to send it to the Sai Mandir at Vidyanagar, after I receive my pay!" The *sadhu* said, "It is the same whether you give it to me or send it to Vidyanagar. You may send it there itself. But I am coming on foot from Nasik. Won't you offer me a little *dakshina*?" Mr. Murthi offered him a twenty—rupees note which was in his shirt-pocket. "You have Rs.20/- more in your pant pocket. Why not give it too?" the *sadhu* said. Precisely that was the amount left with him! He took it out and gave away. But inwardly, he was anxious that it was all he had and nothing was left for his sundry expenses. The *sadhu* received it, but said, "Why worry that you don't have anything for pocket expenses? Take it!" and returned Rs.20/-, blessed them and left!

Mr. Anjaneyulu was a devotee of Baba. His little daughter Gayatri used to evince unusual interest in his worship of the great *sadguru*. One night, he was held up at his office owing to heavy work. At midnight, he had a vision. He saw the little girl sitting on the table in front of him! So vivid was the experience that he was anxious that she might fall down from it and bent forward to hold her. The 'child' emanated the characteristic odor of a highly fevered body and vanished in a moment. About two days later, the little girl woke her father up at midnight saying, "Baba has come, dad!" When she was shown a picture of Baba she said, "Yes, it is he! He drove

away a male buffalow by his divine power of *mantra* and has beckoned to me!" Shortly after, she had an attack of common cold for a couple of days. One day the child looked at Baba, dropped the doll in her hand and gave up her spirit. Precisely on the thirteenth day after the girl's demise, the whole house was pervaded by a strange perfume. The parents took it as the child's last wish that the Thursday should be observed as holy to Baba and arranged special *bhajan* and *puja*. Evidently, Baba has not only indicated the coming event to the blessed parents and prepared their minds, but also vindicated that the death was intentionally permitted by him in the interests of the child's spirit.

Owing to such experiences, many were drawn into Baba's fold and, as per the prophecy of Sri Samarth Narayan Maharaj, a *satsang* hall came up and was inaugurated on August 4, 1982. On that day, a life-size painting of Baba, donated by devotees, was installed in it. One of the principal donors, Mr.Ramana Reddy could not visit the mandir for a few days. One night, Baba appeared in his dream and said, "You have left me there and you have not visited me again!" Next day onwards, he promptly began visiting the *mandir* often. At one of the mass-feedings at the *mandir*, one of the devotees distributed *prasad* to the people. When it was almost spent out, he kept a little of it for a few of his devotee-friends and refused to give it to a poor man who asked for it. The same night, the Master appeared in a dream and was cross with him for not serving him the *prasad* at the *mandir!* Evidently, the *fakir* again insisted that devotees should be aware of his identity with every soul.

At Kalichedu

Weekly *satsang* was commenced by Mr. P.Subbaramaiah at the village of Kalichedu, a few years ago. With the passage of time, the spiritual attunement of the group seems to have grown stronger. For, as noted in the chapter *The Harbinger Of Grace*, the great saint, Avadhuta Venkaiah Swami had graced it on a holy Dattajayanti. Besides, the spirit of *satsang* seems to have commenced beckoning more souls into its fold. A few instances:

Mrs. Mehaboob Basha was suffering from a uterine tumor for some time. On September 31, 1982, her condition grew serious and she was admitted in Dr. C.R. Reddy's hospital at Gudur for surgical operation. While she was being operated upon, at noon one day, her condition took a serious turn. Mr. Mehaboob Basha who was anxiously waiting in the doctor's chamber thought of invoking divine help as his last hope. He stood, alone and friendless, in front of Sai Baba's picture in that room, offered a lighted joss– stick and prayed, "Lord, am I to be a widower at this age, and are my little children fated to be motherless? Lord, save me from this predicament!" The next moment, some one patted him from behind. As he looked back over his shoulder, he saw a tall old man in clean white dress who assured him, "Nothing amiss will befall your wife. Don't weep!" Basha wiped his eyes and turned back, but the old man was nowhere! As he stepped out of the room in amazement, the hospital staff told him that the crisis had passed and his wife was out of danger! Shortly after, the young housewife regained her health. Basha atonce realized that Baba had saved his wife. The same day, he installed a framed picture of the immortal *fakir* in his house and started praying to him every day.

Similarly, there was an instance of a poor ailing housewife being administered a tablet in a dream by Baba and she recovered her health by the next day. A host of such experiences drew several souls into Sai Baba's fold. One such devotee gave away a small plot of ground for a Sai

mandir. In the last week of March 1983, a devotee visited me in Madras and gave me a few chips of the old flooring of Sai Baba's Dwarakamai, to be used for any sacred purpose. On my way back, the *satsang* group of Kalichedu met me at Nellore and wanted me to fix a date for the foundation – laying ceremony for the *mandir*. I chose April 24, a Thursday which is sacred to Baba. Then, I was suddenly impelled to give them the sacred stone chips I had, to be put beneath the foundation – stone to sanctify the proposed structure. The party then asked me to present a beautiful oil painting of Baba for the proposed *mandir*, so that they could have it as a sacred *memento* of my love for them. I spontaneously assented. Later, when I considered its size and the costs involved, I felt it was beyond my means. On my way home, I was thinking whether I should request any fellow-devotee to share the expense. At Ongole, my head quarters, one Mr. Ramana Reddy had a dream the earlier night: an old man gave him a challan form and told him to deposit Rs.574/- to the "government". He woke up and was at a loss to know what the old man (Baba) meant. He enquired whether the local Sai *mandir* had any arrears to clear, like the electricity bills, but there was no such. He spoke to me about it and readily offered to pay the amount for the proposed oil-painting. Baba has solved my problem.

The painting was made in just three and a half days and framed. On March 21, it was taken in a procession to the local Sai *mandir* and worshipped. Immediately after, a lady told me that the same day, a little before dawn, she saw a holy old man who resembled Baba in the painting, in her dream. As we discussed the problem of arranging conveyance for the framed 4 ½ feet picture to the out-of-the-way village of Kalichedu, she offered to take it there, as her brother at Nellore had a car. And she had to visit him the next day, anyway! She took it to Nellore by train and her brother received her at the railway station. She was pleasantly surprised to learn at home that her brother's family was told a few days earlier by an astrologer that a great *guru* would grace their house on the 23rd. Baba had graced their house in the form of his painting, precisely on that date. They worshipped it with due ceremony and devotion and delivered it at Kalichedu by night fall. In the early hours of the next morning, Baba appeared in a dream to a local devotee and said, "I've arrived here last night in a snuff-colored car!" Next morning, he saw the painting and learned that the dream-message was indeed precise and true! When we consider the beautiful pattern of the incidents, we see the power of *satsang* at work.

The power of satsang is well demonstrated and such activity is what could strengthen the *sadhana* of individuals while contributing to the moral and spiritual uplift of the society. The Sai Baba Mission at Ongole has therefore been formed to propagate the idea and to furnish the materials needed for conducting such activity, especially in the rural and semi-urban areas.

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1 The Telugu Version of this book which is now reissued under the title, "Sai Baba Jeevita Charitra".

The Harbinger of Grace

All the mystics of the world and all saints have declared that the immediate presence of a realized sage is one of the most potent forces in the spiritual advancement of a seeker (*sadhak*). Contact with them induces in us inner calm and purity, restores our sense of values, wipes out illusory allurements of the senses and turns us spiritwards with renewed vigour. Besides, when approached in the proper manner, they can enable us to realize that all saints are one in essence. That is why it is necessary for a true seeker after realization to contact several realized souls; *'The Gurugita'* thus says, "Just as the honey-fascinated bee goes from flower to flower, so should the wisdom-fascinated person go from *guru* to *guru*".

Some do not realize the need for this and mistake the act of seeing several saints as amounting to deserting their own *guru*, as a sign of their flickering faith. This may be true in the case of those whose faith is weak. But again, such a condition is a consequence of their initial error. True seekers should first see several *gurus*, hear their teaching watch their ways and only then fix their faith where it naturally abides in course of time. Such a one's faith would not flicker. Besides, it would even help him to realize that his own *guru* is not merely an embodied mortal but is the spirit which is manifest in all *guru*-forms. This is the spirit of the statement quoted from *'The Gurugita'*. It signifies that honey is one though flowers are varied and a bee, being wise, does not care for the form and colour of the flowers but cares for the honey they contain.

This is the spirit of Baba's *leela* of demonstrating that he is one with all saints. That Baba approves of such an attitude is shown by the fact that whenever his devotee ardently prays for true enlightenement alone and has transcended the erroneous view that seeking the blessings of other saints is contrary to reposing faith in him, he brings him in contact with several great saints and shows that he is one with them. Though I have mentioned some instances in the Introduction, I shall deal with a few more of such instances in this chapter.

R. Sarath Babu (24), P.Vijayakumar (25) and T.D.K. Murthy (27) were old students of our college and they had been regularly attending Thursday *bhajans* and daily *satsang* at my house. The three wanted to witness the *Kumbha Mela* in 1976 in Allahabad. On the way they wished to take *darshan* of the Samadhi of Hazrat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur and see Videha Sri.Annasuyamata of Paradsinga (20 miles from Nagpur).

All the members of our group look upon all saints as forms of Baba and, before visiting any of them, pray to him to grace them with the special attention and blessings of the saint so that our faith that he is one with them might be strengthened. Accordingly, the three worshipped Baba and started for Nagpur. I wished them godspeed and assured them that Baba would go ahead of them and make all the arrangements necessary. Indeed, their experiences on the trip did bear out the truth more strikingly than we could imagine.

They first went to Dr.Anil of Nagpur, a devotee of Sai Baba who had sent them with a letter of introduction to Sri V.D. Dholey, President of the Samsthan at Paradsinga. What happened subsequently was communicated to me in a letter dt. 31-1-1977 by Dr. Anil. I quote the relevant sentences from it:

"They reached there safely and enjoyed the meals offered by Sri. V. D. Dholey. Thereafter Sri. Dholey took them along for having the holy *darshan* of Sati Mata (i.e. Anasuyadevi); they stayed there for about 24 hours. Shri Mata allowed them to sleep in her room in the night. On 29-1-1977 the below mentioned message had been conveyed to me from Samsthan of Paradsinga (in Marathi language) and I have been asked to convey the same to you in English.

1) Just at the very moment when they got down at Paradsinga bus stand, the elder sister of Shri Dholey saw, a circle of wide circumference, highly shining and celestial, dazzling light in the form of a globe, momentarily and that was witnessed by a few other family members too.

2) And within fifteen minutes after its disappearance these three of your disciples entered the residence of Mr. Dholey. All members of that family were aware beforehand that 'something new' was going to happen during the forthcoming moments. Because hitherto none of them had ever witnessed the above sort of scene or occurrence.

3) When these three were taken to the temple of Mata she was sitting on the decorated bed encircled by a group of devotees. No sooner than these three entered Shri Sati Mata murmured rather in a whimsical way, *"Karate mi Ram Ram"* by way of greeting.

4) Then she suddenly asked then *'Kon desh Kay Nao?'* i.e. *"Where from have you come?"*

5) As these three were unable to understand Marathi language, she by herself answered, 'Dakshinatele Lok Dev Pahayala Alet' i.e. 'You have been supported by Godly power; hence God has called upon and bestowed upon you this opportunity to visit (me)… These three requested her to help them in completion of their *sadhana*. She replied, *"Bhajan Kari, Bhajan kari, Chandra Kahi Halena, Kahi Dolena"* i.e., 'You are singing *bhajans*; yet you are not successful i.e. your cry to reach the destination could not shake His heart'… They asked her through Shri Dholey what should be done in order to reach the destination. Shri Mata replied, *'Hat Dharun Chalav'* i.e., 'Walk hand in hand or strictly follow the words of *guru*. Then these *Trimurthi* ventured to ask the originality of Mata (i.e. who she is). Shri Mata replied, *'Anasuya… Anasuya he sarva Jagat Prasiddha Ahe'; 'Ti Anasuya Satya yugtil Anasuya Ahe'* i.e. Anasuya… Anasuya is famous all over the world. The same Anasuya of *Satyayug* is here'. Then she murmured that these three name their *guru* as 'Master… Master… Master is God' and with these words, with the help of her fingers she applied the saliva of her tongue on her forehead, (i.e. between her eyebrows)… Lastly these three disciples of yours had placed the photograph of Shri Sai Baba and you before her on the bed. She lifted up the same with her hands and touched mainly your photograph twice or thrice with her tongue. The same photograph was kept by her covered under the *sari* for the whole of the night. When she touched your photograph with tongue she pronounced *'Rishi, Rishi……Two Rishis. One on horse'* (perhaps this refers to Shirdi Sai Baba and his horse Shyam Karna)….. She looked at both the photographs for a good length of time.

The mysterious globe of light which Shri Dholey's sister had seen just before the arrival of the three young men at their house is, in my view, Sai Baba. I was told Shri Mata Anasuya's revelation that she is indeed the famous Anasuya of yore was an unique gesture on her part which no one before could elicit from her. So too the three young men being permitted to sleep in her room for the night and her unusually cheerful mood in their presence had surprised a few of those present. All this is Sai Baba's grace reaching these aspirants through the physical form of Mata Anasuya. The truth of this interpretation of the incidents is borne out by what Mr. Sarath Babu has to supplement to the above details:

"As we entered Mr. Dholey's house we were pleased to notice the photograph of Sai Baba hanging at the entrance. Mr. Dholey was excited as he read the letter (of introduction written by Dr. Anil). He received us very cordially and said, "Your *guru* (Sai Baba) is always with you. He came here just a few minutes earlier", We could not make out what he was referring to. Then he said, to our surprise, that just ten minutes before we arrived at their house all the members of his family saw, very distinctly, a blue, luminous light for about two minutes in their verandah, exactly where we later stood… the other residents of the village put out lights at 8.30 p.m. and the Dholeys were all stunned to see the light there at about 9 p.m. As they were all still discussing the phenomenon we entered their house.

In 1967, I was laid up with a relapse of typhoid and was admitted in a hospital at Chirala (Prakasam Dt. A.P.). I wondered why Baba who almost always intervened in my affairs to set them right, had allowed this to happen. One day when I was telling my fellow patients and visitors about Sri Saibaba and other saints, one of the patients told me that there lived at Chirala, an old bearded man in rags, with matted hair, and that he never minded wind, sun or rain. I was told that he continuously wandered from place to place, resting now and then on the roadside; that he did not speak to anyone nor did he accept anything from anyone except the one whom he chose. The fellow patient asked me to see the man described and determine whether he was a saint or not.

It was on a Thurday morning after my prayer, that I was told all this and it at once struck me that, probably, Baba had used my illness to serve the purpose of getting me in touch with a living great saint. So I at once told my visitor friend to take me to him that day. My friend was at first hesitant to do so and asked me to wait till I was well. But I insisted.

My friend first went out and saw where the holy one was and took me there in a rickshaw. There, in the front verandah of a thatched hotel was seated, a man of about 50 or 55, his clothes all dirty and dust-laden, his whole body unwashed, his hair and beard growing long and twined like ropes. He had a leg swollen with elephantiasis. He sat there smoking and blinking at the world like one stupefied. I at first felt that he could be anything but a saint. Even when I stood close to him he took no notice of me. I wondered whether he was sane at all.

Time passed in awkward silence and I tried twice to attract his attention by bowing to him. He did not seem to have noticed it at all. I immediately became aware of a subtle but significant change gradually coming in my mind. All thoughts regarding the *Swami* and the self-conscious waiting on my part and my apprehensions of what the passers by on the road would think of me

were rapidly dissolved into a profound inner peace which deepened more and more firmly. I sat down and my body was getting more and more locked up in one posture and it was imbibing the peace. I at once knew that I was in the presence of a perfect *avadhuta*. He just glanced at me and I joined my palms in salutation. He took no notice of it. I gradually grew aware of my friend's presence by my side. I felt I should see the saint alone and left for the hospital. The words of Bhagavan Ramana that the inner peace we experience effortlessly in the presence of a sage is the hallmark of his perfect *jnana* had sealed my opinion of the *swami*. However, I wished to take another chance.

Next day, I saw him alone at the same place. During the first few minutes I met with the same seeming indifference of the sage to my presence accompanied by the same peace. I bowed to him thrice and he took no notice of it. A painful apprehension that I was not worth his attention was slowly occupying my heart. I was in a mood to quit. Suddenly a way of trying to contact him flashed in my mind. I silently prayed to Baba, "Baba, you have demonstrated that you are one with all saints. If, indeed, you are identical with this one too, and if you want me to see him often, you have to demonstrate it to me. I shall silently repeat your sacred name a hundred times and if, before I finish the number, this saint gives me something without my asking, I shall take it that I am his as I am yours".

So saying, I started silently repeating Baba's name. By the time I repeated it some 40 times, the saint sat upright, took out something from his pocket and gave it to me saying, "Take it!". I stretched my hand for it and he placed a cigarette and a match box. "Smoke it" he said. I never smoked in my life earlier nor was I willing to do so then.

Just when I was about to say 'No' it occurred to me that it was I that prayed for some token of grace from him and I looked on him as Baba. How improper to reject what he deigned to offer me as a token of grace!

I took it and smoked it. He immediately offered me another and I smoked it too. In the meanwhile, the hotel-keeper came out and asked the *swami* what he wanted. "Serve *idli*, *chilli* powder and chutney to this *swami*", he said pointing at me. In a moment a bearer handed him the same which the *swami* passed on to me. I almost panicked. How improper for one who was passing the ninth day of relapse of typhoid to eat the stuff! Yet my feelings again told me, 'This is a test of your faith that it is Baba who responds to you through the *swami*'. I at once ate what was given. Then came *dosa*, *upma* and a glass of milk! Then followed two packets of cigarettes all of which I smoked. It was 3-45 p.m. and I had to be in the hospital by 4 p.m. when the doctor arrives there. As this thought crossed my mind the *swami* said, "You may go, *swami*!".

As I returned to the hospital in a rickshaw, I could not decide whether I should tell the doctor what I ate that day or not, I decided to wait till 10 p.m. and tell him the same if necessary. Quite surprisingly there was no fever any longer! It was evident that Baba gave me a great demonstration of his grace, more than I had asked for. Subsequently, for about five years I visited the *swami* as often as I could. Thus Baba had blessed me with the *darshan* of one more great saint for which I had prayed him at Shirdi years earlier. Further, he had won for me the blessings and *prasad* of this saint and demonstrated that he was not different from the *avadhuta*.

This is a typical instance of my experiences with all saints I had seen and in almost all cases, I invariably had a demonstration, subtle or gross, of Baba's oneness with all of them. I now firmly believe that one who is dear to Baba will invariably be so to any other great saint. One who loves Baba for no other gain than true enlightenment is sure to win the grace of other saints. To show that it is not my individual experience alone, I shall quote a few instances of other devotees' experiences known to me.

Sri. P. Subbaramaiah, a science teacher in the high school at Kalichedu village (Nellore Dt.) has been devoted to Sri Sai Baba since a few years. Once he visited a great saint named *Avadhuta* Venkaiah Swami (mentioned in the introduction) and requested him to grace his house. "Not now. We shall see later!", he said. In 1977 Subbaramaiah had completed the thirteenth *parayan* of the Telugu version of this book by the time of holy *Gurupurnima*. Quite surprisingly, a day before that holy day, the *swami* visited his house, lit up the holy fire (*dhuni*) there and blessed their family! That day the Sai devotees of that place were performing incessant *bhajan* from 6 a.m to 6 p.m. at the house of Smt. Subbamamba. The *Avadhuta* graced this function too for half an hour. The strangest part of it is that he never visits anyone's house and even when there is a heavy rain he has to be forcibly taken for shelter into someone's and even then, he sits only in the verandah. Besides, the *swami* accepted the hospitality offered by Sri Subbaramaiah. His immediate disciples marvelled at his quite unwonted gesture. Nothing can explain this except the grace of Baba!

A. Bhaskar Reddy, an old student and a regular member of our *satsang* group who is now living at Sullurpet had tried once or twice to see the same saint but he did not succeed. On 12-9-77, he went to Nellore on some work. While going along a road he was impelled to turn a corner for no apparent reason. As he passed through a narrow street, a rickshaw passed by his side and the person seated in it loudly told a tailor in a shop on the roadside that he was going to visit Sri Avadhuta Vankaiah Swami at Golagamudi. Bhaskar stopped the rickshaw and requested the person in it to convey his *pranams* to the *Swami* and told him that he too would try to visit the saint that day.

Later, at 12-30 noon, Bhaskar visited the *swami*. The latter told him to sit aside for a while and come to him a little later. As Bhaskar sat in a corner, the devotees there told him that a little before his arrival the *swami* said to them, "A brahmin is coming here!" It is evident that thereby the *swami* was not referring to the formal caste to which Bhaskar belongs but to his yearning for enlightenment. Later Bhaskar saw the *swami* and the latter said to him, "A devotee will join you. Together both of you are going to look after the work of a temple". He repeatedly asked Bhaskar, "What do you want?" "I want only your grace", Bhaskar said. The *swami* told the other devotees, "I had already blessed him! Not only him but I had blessed his village too; I have granted him lots of devotion and faith". Then Bhaskar again offered to bow to the *swami* and the latter said, "You have already earned the grace of great ones. Where is the need to bow again?" Obviously, by 'great ones' the *swamy* meant Sai Baba and the other saints whom Bhaskar saw with Baba's grace. When he said that he had blessed not only Bhaskar but also his village, he was referring to the fact that at Bhaskar's house Thursday *bhajans* and *satsang* were being conducted and several people of the village were attending it.

Sai Baba secures for us not only the blessings of living saints but also of those who had long ago passed away. These experiences of devotees also confirm his oneness with them. We have noted in the Chapter, "Sai Baba is in all saints" that he had demonstrated his identity with Sri Samarth of Akkalkot. Even today there seems to be a special affinity between these two saints as the following experiences indicate.

Mrs. R. Venkataratnamma, wife of Sri. R. Surendra Babu, (the then Head Master, Z.P. High School, Kota) records her experience:

"My son, Sarath Babu, a close disciple of Sri Bharadwaja brought a manuscript copy of the life of Sri Akkalkot Maharaj written by his Master. He said that I would get peace of mind if I studied and copied out the biography. So I started copying the script devoutly. After a few days, one night I had a vivid dream. An unusually tall *sadhu* with long hands, wearing a *dhothi* (loin cloth) appeared. He was holding a brass vessel (i.e. chembu) in one hand. I had a vivid feeling in the dream that he was Akkalkot Maharaj. He asked me to give him a *seer* of milk. He clearly told me that I owed him that *seer*. The next moment I woke up. Till then I had no opportunity to see the photograph of the Maharaj. But later when I saw it, to my pleasant surprise it exactly tallied with the figure I saw in my dream.

I was at a loss to know why he asked me for milk because I had never vowed to offer any, either to the Maharaj or Baba. I conveyed my dream to Sri Bharadwaja who asked me to offer the milk to Baba the next Thursday, saying there must be some connection which we might not know. The next Thursday when I was boiling the milk to be offered to Baba, my mother-in-law, casually asked me why I was doing so. She arrived only on that day, after a fifteen day's stay at her daughter's house. I told her about the dream. She was surprised and told me that a few days ago when she was away, she fell ill, and vowed to Sri Sai Baba that she would offer a *seer* of milk if she recovered soon. Accordingly she recovered soon and returned home that day. Only then could I know the purport of the dream. I realized that Sai Baba and Akkalkot Maharaj are really one in spirit. My mother-in-law vowed to Sai Baba but Akkalkot Maharaj claimed the offering!

Similarly, once the mother of Mr. Sarma had darshan of Sri Samarth on several occasions, and the most striking instance is as follows. Once Sri M.B.R. Sarma had completed nine devotional readings of the life Sri Swami Samarth. That day at noon his mother was resting on a cot in the backyard of the house. She felt sleepy but thought that if she fell asleep, monkeys which are rampant there might slip into the house. She opened her eyes and when she looked about she saw Sri Swami Samarth seated there! But strangely enough, it did not seem surprising to her. She casually thought, "While the *swamy* is seated there how can monkeys enter?" After sometime the same doubt occurred to her and she again looked at the back and again saw the *swamy* sitting there. That happened some four or five times. She also saw some other holy man sitting by his side but she did not know who it was. Much later she got up and found nobody there. Where Baba's devotees are, there are all saints! That is the purport of this *leela*.

Smt. Susheeladevi and Sri Bhatkal were devotees of Bhagvan Ramana Maharshi and considered him as their *guru*. At the time of Bhagwan's *mahasamadhi* they were in Switzerland and could not take his last *darshan*. A fortnight afterwards, when they arrived in Madras, they were

approached by some devotees of Sai Baba for donation for the construction of a Sai *Mandir*. Smt. Bhatkal told them that her *guru* was Bhagavan and she had to go to Tiruvannamalai first. The devotees said that Sri Ramana and Sai Baba were not different from each other and assured her that she should realize it if she visited Shirdi. She went to Shirdi on 3-3-1953. There, at *Gurusthan* she and her fellow-devotee Smt. Dongre had a vivid *darshan* of Sri Ramana Maharshi in Sai Baba's photograph! She was immensely pleased with the *darshan* and stayed at Shirdi for seven days, and read '*Sri Sai Satcharita'*.

It was the year 1974. One day an old gentleman named A. Subbarayudu came to my room. He looked every inch a pious, orthodox brahmin. He is the father of my friend and colleague, Sri A.E. Purushottam Rao (Department of Mathematics). He told me that his sacred-thread ceremony was performed in his ninth year and ever since, he had been assiduously attending to the *japa* of the sacred *Gayatri mantra*. But he complained that his mind was never still. I then told him of the need to resort to the succour of a great *siddha purusha*. Henceforth, everyday he used to visit me and I used to read to him from my books on Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Sai Baba. This devotional reading produced the needed impact and he felt much elevated spiritually.

During our reading of the book on Swami Samarth we came across the instance of the great saint giving his belongings like the rosary and *sandals* (padukas) to his closest disciple and my comment thereon that such gifts from great saints would be charged with some of their spiritual vibrations and that they would keep the recipient in good stead.

Then Sri Subbarayudu told me of a moslem saint at his native place. The saint wandered as a mad man. He often played on a flute-like musical instrument which wafted his spirit into ecstatic trances for days on end. While everyone in the village took him for a mad man, one old lady had recognized the spiritual fire in him and served him food everyday. At last, one day he called at her house and gave her a staff saying, "Mother, you have served me with loving care. The time has come for me to quit this earth. Keep this, my staff, with you as a token of my blessing. It will do you good". The lady received the staff reverentially and cherished it for some time. One day she showed it to Sri Subbarayudu.

Sri Subbarayudu recounted the incident and said how blessed the old lady was and that prior to his listening to the account of Swami Samarth's life, he did not realize the value of the saint's gift to the lady. He added that the whole episode took place hardly a year or two earlier. A passing thought came to me that if I had known of the existence of such a saint earlier, I could have secured the staff myself. And I mentally complained to Baba that he had not blessed me with it.

After the summer vacation, one Thursday morning, Sri Subbrayudu called at my house. I was in a hurry to leave for the college and I was slightly uneasy at the old man's arrival at such a moment. "I am sorry to call on you now. I know you would be in a hurry to go to the college. I shall take only a few minutes' time…. This is the staff the moslem saint had given the old lady at my place", he said, putting the same in my hands! I wondered how he could get it from the lady.

"The old lady at my place had one day come to my house during this vacation and gave this to me, saying that she was somehow strongly impelled to do so. I accepted it most gratefully. Eversince it came to me I had a good push in my meditation. But somehow, since a few days of my coming here, whenever I tried to meditate keeping the staff with me, I felt a terrible inner disturbance, much worse than before! I felt that I could not keep it any longer. It strongly occurred to me that orthodox as I am, the staff which carries with it the spiritual vibrations of a moslem saint has not agreed with my vibrations which are tuned to the *Vedic* tradition. But knowing the value of a gift from a saint, I could not conceive of throwing it away or even returning it to the old lady. So I was thinking of giving it to someone who can cherish it with the devotion and respect it deserves. This morning, when I sat in meditation, I was thinking of this question and suddenly you came to my mind. As you belong to the flock of Sai Baba who has harmonized both the traditions in himself, I thought I should give it to you. The thought was so compelling that I could not help but come with it now. Take it", he said, keeping it in my hands.

Think of it all! A pious old man comes, on a Thursday, immediately after I had finished my prayer to Baba, and gives me the very holy object for which I had a longing thought for a moment months ago! Is not Baba the harbinger of grace? The sturdy walking stick stands in my *puja* room as a testimony to Baba's watchful care of his devotees' holy aspirations.

Smt. Kamala of the nearby village writes: "When Sri Narayan Maharaj was camping nearby, I wished to see him the next morning and I read Baba's life to secure his blessing. Early next morning, after ablutions, I worshipped Baba's picture and offered him two bananas. Afterwards, when I touched them, I felt something like an electric shock and passed into deep meditation wherein I grew oblivious of everything except the picture of Baba. Then I heard a voice from it. 'I've taken one fruit. Give the other to Narayana Maharaj!' When I regained normal awareness, I found one fruit missing. The one that was left was too black and soft to be offered to Sri Maharaj. So I gave away a piece of it to everyone in the house. When I visited him, Sri Maharaj at once said, "Where is the fruit? Hasn't Baba told you? Have you lost your head? Why have you done like this?" Then he recounted everything as it happened at my house.

One day, I noticed a cobra moving about the snakepit in our backyard. The next day, Sri Maharaj said, "It is a great *mahatma*. It has a 'gem' in its hood. Take care that no one harms it!" Where Baba is, there are all the *mahatmas*. Henceforth, I meditated everyday for some time near the snakepit.

For sometime, I longed to see Sri Ranganna Babu. On December 4, he visited Sri Bharadwaja and both of them came to our house. Entering my room of worship, he said, 'Your *puja* room is quite peaceful!' Once I took *darshan* of Sri Avadhuta Venkaiah Swami. He accepted the gruel and biscuits we offered and gave us a little of it as *prasad*. I meditated for sometime in his presence and found that a permanent change for the better had occurred in my being. So too, when I visited late *Mataji* Revati Amma in Madras and told her that I came from Sri Bharadwaja, she lovingly led me into her room, rested my head on her lap and gave me a little of the betel she was chewing, as *prasad*. On another visit, she presented me with her sari and blouse and blessed me saying, "In such a place as this, you have a special place. You always have my blessing! Rest content with it". One day, as I was in bed, I had a vision in which I saw an announcement in *'The*

Hindu' that Mother Revathi Amma had taken *samadhi*. In four days, I came to know that she passed away precisely at the moment of my vision and it was announced in the same paper!

Sai Baba the Eternal Symbol

Every perfect saint is an embodiment of the spiritual tradition to which he belongs, either by birth or by choice. Sai Baba is unique in that he does not belong to any single tradition, or rather, he belongs to all traditions. We therefore find in his physical existence, a symbol or a glyph of the divine mysteries of creation. When we consider why he chose to present himself in a particular manner amidst us, we feel that it referred to a profound spiritual truth. It is rewarding to venture a guess at a few aspects of this truth.

Baba first appeared in the outskirts of Shirdi as a boy of sixteen. This age seems to have a special significance in the lives of many *mahatmas*. Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi had the first experience of realisation at the same age. Sri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegoan, the great contemporary of Sai Baba, first appeared as a naked boy of sixteen. In Christ's life too, this age seems to have marked a major turning point.

Baba's appearance was such that his religion could not be recognised. His appearance and conduct showed that he was totally enlightened. His complete non-attachment and solitude were such as to remind perceptive observers of the fact that our 'Awareness' is a unity untouched by the objects of perception and impossible to be subjected to the distinctions of caste and creed.

Baba was always sitting under the neem tree. In most religions, the tree symbolises the whole creation in that (a) both have their roots hidden from our immediate perception; (b) both are ever growing, renewing themselves, putting forth new and different forms and shedding the old. The Word *Kalpa Vriksha* (wish-fulfilling tree) means also 'the tree of creation'. The opening verses of chapter XV of The *Bhagavadgita* describes the world as a tree. The Hinayana School of Buddhism represents the Buddha through the image of a tree. The Norse religion speaks of the tree *Igdracil*. It is fitting that Baba, who demonstrated that he is the Spirit underlying the whole of creation as its ground and source, should sit at the base of a tree.

There is a particular significance in Baba choosing the neem tree. Its sap is bitter. This signifies the first noble truth of the Buddha which says that phenomenal existence is conditioned by sorrow. Yet, medicinally, the neem tree is very valuable. Though this phenomenal creation is a web of sorrow and impermanence, it is also the only possibility for the human spirit to work out its *karmic* store and to heal itself of the disease of spiritual ignorance. Such a tree of creation has, at its base, the Supreme Spirit which is joy and freedom. Baba sitting under the tree represents this spirit, helping the souls to utilize the sorrow of life as a point of departure for their quest for spiritual wisdom. Further, those who remember the Spirit that underlies all things, are freed from the sorrows of life. Such a way of life is represented by the particular branch of the neem tree under which Baba sat. No wonder that the leaves of that branch were found to be particularly free from bitterness. If bitterness stands for sorrow, sweetness, which is its opposite, must stand for joy. The mere absence of bitterness (and sweetness) stands for the supreme spiritual state

which is above the pairs of relative joy and sorrow which is promised by such a life of awareness of the omnipresent Spirit. Sri Upasani Baba, in the fourth and fifth of his sixteen verses in praise of Sai Baba, had hinted at this symbolic significance. Hindu tradition also describes Lord Dakshinamurthi, the God of Wisdom, as a youth seated at the foot of the banyan tree (as Baba was, when he first appeared in 1854). Sri Krishna is described as standing under the *tamala* tree. It is significant that Siddhartha attained *Bodhi* at the foot of the *Bodhi* tree.

Baba lived by begging at five houses in the village. All the ancient religions considered the whole creation as made of the five elements. The Supreme Spirit, when it manifests itself on the material plane as an *avatar*, has to draw constantly from these five elements for sustaining its physical form. Again, mind manifests its five powers of objective perception in the form of five senses from which it has to draw all its sustenance of relative experiences of the phenomena. The underlying principle of these two phenomena is symbolised by Baba's act of begging (as also by Lord Siva's and Lord Dattatreya's, in Hindu mythology).

Baba always maintained the perpetual fire or the *dhuni*. Fire-worship played a significant part in Hindu and Parsi religions. Fire, according to the Vedas, is a particular manifestation of the energy which is the stuff of which the whole universe is made. Thus the whole creation is described by The *Purushasukta* in the *Veda* as the cosmic fire-sacrifice (*yagna*). The same concept of yagna is elucidated by Krishna in The *Bhagavadgita*. The fire of that sacrifice is the cosmic consciousness in which the manifold creation is projected, maintained and constantly transformed. The end product of the fire-sacrifice is *udi* or *vibhuti*. The many forms that are perceived in the waking state are consecrated to the fire of Supreme consciousness in one's meditation and contemplation and are realised to be devoid of all the apparent distinctions. They are, in essence, one with the Spirit. This supreme realisation on the one hand and the realisation that all phenomena in nature are perishable and so unworthy of our craving, is signified by *udi* which Baba distributed to all. It is the one panacea for all the ills of life. The Sanskrit word *vibhuti* means 'the possession or attribute of the Supreme Lord (Vibhu)'. Indeed, as we have noted above, the attributes of the Supreme Spirit are also the attributes of *vibhuti*, the imperishable essence of things. Thus Indian scriptures describe Lord Siva, the Destroyer, as besmearing himself with it.

The natives of Shirdi came to know that the young *fakir* had practised severe spiritual discipline (*tapas*) in the underground cellar beneath the neem free for a long time before he became accessible to them in 1854. This symbolises the spiritual truth that the Godman springs into manifestation in Time from the substratum of all creation, from its unknown depths of *Parabrahman*. In the individual, the divine awakening starts at the root centre of the *muladhara* when it rises up, according to the yogic lore.

Baba's second advent at Shirdi along with Chand Patil is interesting. Baba restored the run-away horse to him and thereby made himself known for what he is, a *sadguru*. This indeed is rich with symbolism. Mind is the horse or the carrier of man to his goal of perfection. But when he loses control over it, it is lost in the wilderness of phenomenal existence. When such a man is earnest in his search for it, he is sure to be brought in touch with a Perfect Master who restores the lost means of his spiritual journey. The twelve ox-herding pictures of Buddhism represent the same truth. In one of his parables, Baba says that a man had a horse which refused to go in pair. A wise man advises him to take it back to the place from which it was brought. This makes the horse obedient. I have explained the significance of the parable in an earlier chapter. We have a parallel to this in Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot restoring the royal elephant which ran amock, to the prince. So did Sri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegoan tame the unruly horse of a devotee, Takhlikar.

After his second and final advent at Shirdi, Baba raised a flower garden on a piece of waste land. The significance of this act is hinted at in the relevant chapter in this book. We have also noted that one of Baba's parables also refers to it with the same significance.

The next significant event in the life of Baba is his stay at the mosque. His arrival there, we have noted, marked his recognition by the people as a *sadguru*. His first appearance under the neem tree was, so to say, a period of incubation, a working at the roots, so that the mighty spiritual tree might unfold itself to the world in its next phase. But henceforth, he is the gateway to the Spirit. True spirituality is above the narrow formalism of religions. As Vivekananda says, religions are the kindergartens of the Spirit. Baba is the Way and the Truth beyond religions. It is significant that he named the mosque as '*Dwaraka mayi*'. The significance of the name as explained by the Skandapurana, is already mentioned in the book. Once Baba, the Truth, comes to dwell in it, it cannot be either a mosque or a temple. It can only be both or none. Besides, it is a particular symbol of Baba's physical frame. Baba was a *Pir* to the Moslem, a *wali*, an *aulia*. He was all the gods to the Hindus and therefore, the *guru*. So was *Dwarakamayi*, a mosque to moslems and a temple to Hindus and Parsees. Both the saint and the place were ever open to the devotees. To both of them Allah, is the *Malik*. When Baba left his physical body, he appeared to some of his devotees in dreams and told them that the *musjid* was fallen. When one of the devotees was making holes in the *musjid* – walls in order to raise a shed for the silver palanquin, Baba described the act as a child injuring the mother's leg. Whenever he received *dakshina* from the devotees, he used to say that *musjid ayi* or mother *musjid* received it and that she would bless them. It is not like any other mosque. Only those whom Allah permitted were allowed inside. How real this symbolic identity between Baba's physical existence and the *musjid* can be seen from the fact that the Samsthan at Shirdi is inspired by Baba to maintain the place as it was, with its *dhuni* and lamps, just as Baba's physical frame continues to manifest itself before many of his

devotees even today.

From the above consideration, it follows that if *Dwarakamayi* represents the physical body of Baba to which people rushed for *darshan*, his visits to the *chavadi* represent the visits of Baba to his devotees in the world in his subtler bodies. Indeed, like the *chavadi* the world is a place where all of us gather again and again for social interaction.

The significance of the *samadhi mandir* is self-evident. It represents the state of *samadhi* in which we can contact him as our true Self, in which "all of us can be happy together", to put it in his own words.

There are six places at Shirdi which are closely connected with Baba:

1) The underground cellar under the neem tree
2) The neem tree
3) *Dwarakamayi*
4) *Nandadeep* at Lendi
5) *chavadi*
6) *Samadhi Mandir*

These six places may together be taken to symbolise the six yogic centres in our body, the seventh being beyond space and time.

This interpretation of Baba's life as a symbol is needed to understand a particular aspect of the phenomenon of divine manifestation in general. When we look into the history of mystical schools of various religions, we find that all religious scriptures are interpreted both as records of historical facts and spiritual, symbolic truths. We have in Hinduism, the story of Rama. Some believe and interpret it as a real fact of history and this plays an important part in their life.
Others interpret Sita as the Self and Rama as the Ego, with Hanuman or the breath as the mystic messenger between the two. Ravana is the sum-total of our evil propensities which conceal the Self from the Ego. Again, some Hindus take the *Mahabharatha* for a piece of history. Others insist on a symbolic interpretation: the body is the Kurukshetra. The Kauravas are the evil tendencies. The Pandavas are the five vital breaths, Droupadi is their common companion, the mind. Sri Krishna is the Self. Mahabharatha was the perpetual battle which goes on in every human being. We find the same approach to the story of the Buddha in Buddhism. While the exoteric schools of Buddhism attach much importance to the historical Buddha and his teachings, esoteric schools (which are secret only in the sense that they cannot be conveyed in words to the intellect) like Zen insist on re-enacting the story in our own being and discovering the Buddha nature in us. In Christianity, the story of Christ is insisted on by some as deriving its value from its historicity. But several mystical schools hold that the birth of Christ, his baptism, crucifixion
as spiritual phenomena which have to be effected in one's own soul.

In all these dual interpretations of the lives of the Godmen, we find that both are equally true. From this it is easy to see that such a perfect manifestation of the divine as Sai Baba calls for both the interpretations for a fuller appreciation of it.

Appendix I to VI

APPENDIX - I

A Previous Life of Sai Baba

In the chapter 'Sai Baba is in all Saints and Sadhus' we have noted a peculiar anecdote. In one of his previous mainifestations, Sai Baba was asked to go to one Mukund and assure him of the success that was at hand in his spiritual endeavour. Soon after, Baba met a prince in the market place and directed him to proceed to Amarkot assuring him that a son would be born to him who would be a king of a country in future. Baba added that this child was Akbar the Great. Obviously, Baba, in narrating these two episodes, implied a connection between Mukund and Akbar. I shall quote the passage which I found in Prof. A.L.Srivastava's book "The Mughal Empire". [1]

"The tradition is recorded in the pages of Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami's *Hadiaq-tul Aqalim*, and when a child, the present writer heard it also from his father who gave the story in detail. It is related that in his previous life Akbar was a Hindu anchorite, entitled Mukund Brahmachari, who was supposed to have undertaken a religious penance (*tap*) at Prayag so that he might be born a powerful Kshatriya King and exterminate Islam from India. But as luck would have it, he was, owing to a mistake in the performance of the *tap*, born as a moslem. Nevertheless, in view of his prenatal-heritage, Akbar acted like a Hindu monarch that he was so anxious to be, and served the interests of Hindu religion and culture. Many a Hindu would not have his breakfast without having seen the emperor's face (*'darshan'*) in the morning".

How close is the connection between this passage in a text book of Indian history and the anecdotes recounted by Baba!

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APPENDIX - II

The Miracles of Sri Sai Baba

The true mystical tradition of all the great religions hold that in the course of intense spiritual discipline, the higher potentialities of man might get awakened and these might secure seeker the power to perform 'miracles' . Besides it also warns the seeker that these miracles might distract him from his goal of perfection and may even cause his moral fall. Some even believe that the performance of miracles will lead to spiritual depletion of the mystic. How then could Sri Sai Baba be considered a genuine, prefer, saint when he almost incessantly performed miracles?

The fact is that there are two classes of 'miracles'. Those performed by those who are still on the path, as an act of will, either for the blatant purpose of self-aggrandisement or for the seemingly benign purpose of winning more souls to faith in the spiritual life. As this class of miracles involves individual will, it only serves to further strengthen the false sense of individuality or ego of the *sadhaka:* it hinders his realization of the One Reality that underlies his self and of others.

It strengthens his fascination for fame and fear of losing it. It is this which leads to the fall and has to be by-passed by the true seeker.

The other class of miracles occur, and are not 'performed', spontaneously without the will of the prefect sage. The very strength of the sage's perfect realization, in its interaction with nature, causes the 'miracle' to take place. Such miracles did take place even in the 'lives' of such as Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharashi. He even elucidated this distinction between the two classes of miracles and said that the miracles of Sri Krishna and of Jesus Christ are of the latter category.

How do we know that Baba's miracles are of this class? Firstly, the fame that accrued to him thereby did not in the least touch his heart as is amply borne out by his way of living. Secondly, we have to judge the tree by the fruit. The miracles which manifested through Baba were just such as are needed to make his devotees ethically and spiritually better evolved. Thirdly, almost all his contemporary saints, whether Hindu, Moslem or Parsi, did all acknowledge his inner perfection long before he came to the notice of the people around him. Fourthly, the miracles did not taint him with egoism nor did his spiritual energy get exhausted even sixty years after his *mahasamadhi*. Fifth, his firm opposition to the performance of the lesser class of miracles is demonstrated by his dealings with the devotee Kusa Bhav.

Bhagawan Sri Ramana is said to have elucidated the distinction between a *Jnani* and *Jnana Siddha* and Sri Sai Baba, like his great contemporary Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot seems to belong to the latter category and this explains why the miraculous experiences of his devotees stand such a characteristic feature of his life.

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APPENDIX - III
An Objection and An Answer

Several readers of Telugu version of the book objected to the chapter in which I have written of some of the famous contemporary devotees of Sai Baba. Different readers averred that most of these devotees do not deserve to be mentioned in such a book, caught as they are in the coils of certain moral lapses.

To this charge I can only give my view point. Moral lapses are a consequence of incomplete spiritual perception of the nature of worldly things and of the spirit. Increased insight into the worthlessness of matters grossly worldly is a product of gradual evolution of consciousness through *sadhana*. In the path of devotion to Baba this development is entirely a matter concerning the devotee in question. We have nothing to bother about it. Sai Baba himself had furnished the true picture of the matter. When one of his devotees wondered how many of those flock to Baba would realize life's goal, he gave an apt parallel. When the mango tree blossoms, how many of these blossoms, buds, tender fruits and half-ripe ones fall off owing to wind, pests, monkeys, children etc? And how few reach the state of ripe fruition? A verse in the *"Bhagavadgita"* too says that of thousands of individuals, only a few turn godward; of these, only very few will realize Him. "Many are called but very few are chosen" says Christ and

illustrates it with the parable of the sower. The devotee's zeal in the pursuit of his goal is of prime concern to him and it is a matter concerning his enlightenment. Why should we bother about it? A true devotee of Baba never does. For, Baba himself had demonstrated what our attitude to such should be. When Jawahar Ali, the pseudo-saint pretended to be the *guru* of Sai Baba, the latter kept quiet. He never bothered to expatiate the former's unworthiness to other devotees. He was very explicit in asking us to shed the sense of difference and to see the one in all if we wish to attain the ultimate object of life *(paramartha).* Then should we bother about any moral lapses in these devotees?

I included them in this book just to show to the readers how Baba is willing to bless his devotees even long after his *mahasamadhi*. How well the utilize the grace thus showered is their headache and not ours. It is enough if we too could strive to win his grace and take care not to fall victims of such lapses. If any of these devotees have any lapses, it only further vindicates how far Baba is willing to grace us inspite of such lapses and how we can fare better if we could rid ourselves of such lapses. It is all the greater incentive to our zeal in self-culture.

To be obsessed with the lapses we see in some devotees is to totally divert our attention from that Baba taught both by his practice and precept and then we do not deserve to be called his devotees. Instead of meditating on the divine in all, we thereby do the reverse of it and the fruits of doing so could be contrary to what we hope to get by following Baba. Perhaps Baba had inspired me to write the chapter partly to bring any such error in us to our attention so that we could strive to shake it off. Do we not see that Baba did something alike in the case of the *Ramadasi* , when he had snatched the book *Vishnu sahasranama* and presented it to Shama?

May Baba inspire in us the wisdom to take what is positive in the accounts of these devotees, and if we notice any of their failings, these help us to be careful against falling into similar errors ourselves.

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APPENDIX - IV
A Note on Devotion to Guru

We have noted in the Introduction that association with a great saint is of paramount importance to spiritual life. Sai Baba's account of his devotion to his *guru* and his saying "Look to me and I look to you" corroborates it. It is relevant to consider a few suggestions for shaping our devotion to Sri Sai Baba along these lines.

Firstly, a life-like picture of Sri Baba is an invaluable asset. To a keen student of Baba's life history, the form of Baba is a powerful reminder of the supreme value of unfaltering meditation on the *guru* and the picture conveys this attitude of Baba. The spiritual greatness of the saint which the picture recalls us will act as a powerful force to motivate us to aspire and strive for that goal. At one stroke, it places all other aspects of our life in their places, giving them, no more value than they deserver. Our attitude to things and persons we encounter in normal life, if so seasoned, is what is implied by *viveka* (insight or understanding) and *vairagya* (absence of

thoughtless fascination for things.) fascination for things.) The sight of Baba's picture thus evokes these two potent forces of *sadhana* in us. And he personified these two forces in his form and life.

Secondly *(i)* a regular and devoted study of the account of Baba's life-history will draw our heart towards the goal spiritual. *(ii)* The experience of the devotees will inspire love, reverence and wonder for the saint and when these attitudes are clearly impressed on us, they keep all our thoughts and feelings hovering about our love for Baba. *sadhana* becomes incessant. It becomes our very life. *(iii)* Usually the manifold objects and creatures of the world and our attitude to
them are the most powerful constituents of mundane life which thwart us in our attempts to keep our life tuned to the Spiritual Reality. To a diligent student of Baba's life, the very obstacle gets transmuted into an aid. The miracles that demonstrate his identity with all creatures, deities and his picture are the aids. After reading these accounts repeatedly, we find that every object and person gets associated with Baba's *leelas* in our mind and so will act as a reminder of Baba. The very things of the world will be the agents for tuning us to Baba.*(iv)* The mysterious experiences such a student usually has will further strengthen these forces. *(v)* Thus the emotional currents of worldly life and of spiritual life get harmoniously synthesized so that we are never out of tune with Baba and yet never out of tune with the world. *(vi)* This further sharpens our *viveka* and *vairagya* by making us realize the triviality of mad sensuality of all types. The innumerable fruits of these adjustments in our psychic life can only be experienced and never enumerated in toto.

Thirdly, we can cultivate the habit of engaging our mind in thoughtful and constant repetition of Baba's name. We can utilize the name to recall Baba's form which, through long association of ideas will, in course of time, evoke all the attitudes mentioned under the second head above. This we can do whenever we have nothing imperative to do. All the hours we usually spend in idle fancies will be turned to good account. Or, the name can be made to evoke in our mind the spiritual powers that his miracles demonstrate, his omniscience, Omnipresence, his dispassion,
his wholehearted meditation on his *guru*, his vigilance over the welfare of his devotees, his transcendence over death etc. Or we can with the strength of this understanding, look on the manifold world as the joyful projection of the one consciousness we call Sai Baba. And Baba's name can be taken as a symbol of this truth.

Fourthly, we can cultivate the habit of mentally offering to Baba anything that we drink or eat and then partaking of it as his consecrated gift to us.

Fifthly, we can set apart the fifteen minutes of the day for tuning our attitude to Baba for the whole day. It consists of a few minutes of recollecting Baba and then reaffirming our resolve to observe the four points we have noted so far. Again the last fifteen minutes of the day we utilize to think of Baba and mending our attunement to Baba whenever it is battered by the day's mundane experiences. We strengthen our *viveka* and *vairagya* as mentioned in the second head before sleeping. A minute of silent prayer before taking food or drink will complete it. Sixthly, making it our habit to partake of Sri Baba's *udi* everyday.

Seventhly, we can and should set apart an hour or two per week for whole-hearted worship of Baba. Here we remember strongly Baba's oneness with his picture. The point is to keep the feeling as a continuous thread through the awareness of his supreme qualities like omnipresence,

omnipotence etc.

Eighthly, we can utilize all the inevitable occasion of contact with others (wherever possible) in sharing with others our loving recollections of Baba and what he did to his devotees. So too, whatever opportunities for action life affords us, we might utilize them to do our best for others with the deep awareness that the same psychic being as ours is theirs too. We should strive to act up to the ideal "Do unto others as you would have done unto you".

The possibilities for such attunement of ours lives are indeed infinite and I leave it here to the creative understanding of the fellow-devotees.

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APPENDIX - V
Chavadi Procession

We have noted that Sai Baba used to sleep in the *musjid* and the *chavadi* on alternate nights. On December 10,1909, the devotees started worshipping him at the *chavadi*. They even led him there in a ceremonial procession, with all pomp and eclat. We shall note here the details of the pageant.

A little before it was time for Baba to start for *chavadi*, the devotees gathered in the frontyard of the mosque and sang *bhajans*. With the small chariot (ceremonial procession car) behind them, the *tulasi* stand (the oscimum sanctum) to the right, Baba before them, the devotees gathered in the middle spot. The young and the old played in various musical instruments like the drum, cymbals, chiplis etc., as they sang. Some stood at the gates of the *musjid*, getting the torches ready for the night procession. Some decorated the palanquin. Some stood there, holding long ornamental staves, now and then loudly hailing, *"Sadguru Sainath Maharaj Ki Jai"* . Rows of oil lamps burned bright on the walls of the masjid. The whole mosque and its premises were decorated with garlands, leaves, flowers and coloured paper. Outside it stood the well-decked horse, Shyama Karna (Moslem devotees called it Shamsuddin).

A little before the moment of Baba's departure arrived, Tatya, along with several other devotees, came to Baba and told him to get ready for the procession to the *chavadi*. Till Tatya himself saw him again and helped him to stand up by lifting him by the arms, Baba sat in wait. Tatya lovingly addressed Sai as 'mama' or uncle. Indeed, so cordial and intimate was their relationship. At last, when Tatya came again and helped him to stand up, Baba took his small staff(*sathka*), clay smoking-pipe and tobacco in hand, put a small piece of cloth on his shoulder and got ready to start for the *chavadi*. Tatya then placed a shawl with golden embroidery over his shoulders. Baba then took a step forward, adjusted the fuel in the *dhuni* with his right foot, put out the oil lamp with his right hand and started from the mosque. At once the devotees played on drums and pipes in the most majestic manner. Crackers were exploded and missiles fired into the air which left a beautiful display of colours in the sky. The devotees started moving on while chanting Baba's holy name to the accompaniment of rapturous music. Some of the devotees even danced in ecstasy. Some of them carried flags and standards. The devotees loudly proclaimed his name

with one voice. They stood in two rows on either side of Baba's path. Some of them fanned him with *chamaris* (tufts of *chamar* tails), while others spread a cloth along his path. As devotees held his arms, Baba slowly walked over the cloth. Tatya held Baba's left hand and Mahalsapathy held his right. Bapusaheb Jog usually held the ceremonial umbrella over his head. The well caprisoned horse walled ahead of him. Behind him followed the devotees, attendants and the band of musicians.

The chanting of the divine name of Hari interspersed with loud proclamation of Baba' name. In this manner, the procession reached the turning at the mosque. Sai Baba used to stand there, facing the mosque. His form wore an unearthly (divine) halo around it. His face looked radiant like the rising sun. As he gazed intently towards the north, it looked as though he was inviting some invisible forces mentally. As the musicians played on the instruments, Baba used to wave his right arm up and down several times. Kaka Saheb used to fetch a red powder called *gulal* and, mixing it with flowers, used to sprinkle them on Baba. The devotees seemed to drink his heavenly appearance with their eyes. Late Sri Hemadpanth who witnessed the scene remarks :- "Words fail to describe the scene and the splendour of this occasion".

(ii) Other Celebrations

Moslem devotees of Baba once commenced the annual festival, in honour of the 'moslem *fakir*' called *urs*. After sometime, Hindu devotees commenced the celebration of Ramanavami. As though in accordance with Baba's mission, the day coincided with the *urs*. Henceforth, devotees of the two communities have been celebrating the two festivals on the same day, in perfect harmony.

After the *mahasamadhi* of Baba, Vijayadasami has come to be the most important festival at Shirdi, as the anniversary of the supreme event. As many devotees believe that Baba is the most complete *avatar* of Lord Dattatreya, the ancient traditional festival of Dattajayathi, the anniversary of the divine descent has also come to be the fourth important celebration. Gradually, all festive occasions of Sai devotees of all religions have been occasions of large festive congregations.

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APPENDIX - VI

Baba's Antecedents

It was late Sri Das Ganu Maharaj who first wrote the story regarding Baba's birth, parentage and discipleship. Later, late Sri B.V. Narasimhaswami has elaborated it in the first part of 'Life of Sai Baba'. We have shown in Chapters II & III of this book that the story could not be true. In fact, when Sri B.V. Narasimhaswami compiled 'Devotees Experiences', Sri Das Ganu Maharaj, in his account, says that he first wrote 'Bhaktisaramrit' chapters 52 and 53 which were approved by Baba. The rest of the story of Baba's life contained in that book was published in 1925. The details of the previous history of Baba which are included in chapter 28 deal with Baba's story at Selu. Das Ganu himself admits that the story was partly based on Baba's stray references, but mostly it was what he gathered from hearsay from the natives of that place. The only thing that Baba is said to have mentioned was that he came from Selu. When Das Ganu was working in the

Police department, he tried to investigate the antecedents of Baba. He admits that he does not even remember which facts of Baba's life were conveyed to him by which native of Selu. All that he could gather was that a hundred years earlier, there lived an old man in Selu; that a *fakir* came and stayed with him; that some people had killed the old *mahatma* for some grudge which they had against him; that the *fakir* had finally escaped.

Now let us see if it is proper to identify the *fakir* in the Selu story with Sai Baba. When I was gathering information about the life of Hazarat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, one of his disciples told me that a *fakir* came to the Baba for instructions, and that he was Sai Baba. I found a similar claim from the devotees of Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot. His devotees claim that Sai Baba was his disciple. I found that the source of all this confusion is the custom of referring to *fakirs* as Sai (a saint). Thus the Sai's mentioned in the three stories above are identical only in their common title. But as the name of Sai Baba of Shirdi became famous, different people came to identify him with the various *fakirs* in the life histories of the three *mahatmas* mentioned above.

Sai Baba told his early devotees of Shirdi that his *guru's* tomb was underneath the local neem tree. He told Swami Sai Sarananandaji, that Roshan Shah was his *guru*. On another occasion, he told Hemadpanth that he met his *guru* in a forest. All this calls into question the authenticity of his connection with the *guru* of Selu. Besides, Das Ganu started his investigation in 1901. So, the Selu-episode could have taken place prior to 1801, according to his account. That is, if this story were true, Baba's age at his arrival at Shirdi ought to be about 50 years. Some say that Baba appeared at Shirdi in 1872. As per this version, if the Selu - episode was true, Baba ought to be 70 years old at his first arrival at Shirdi. We thus find no possibility of the story being true. If Baba's single statement that he came from Selu is to be accepted literally, what should we think of his identifying himself with the Mauliv Saheb of Nanded and with Swami Samarth of Akkalkot? It is possible that his reference to Selu was just a cryptic statement implying something totally different.

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1 p.173, Seventh Edition 1970, published by Shivlal Agarwal and Co., Agra-3.